



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

UC-NRLF



\$B 264 970



LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA.

GIFT OF
Mrs. SARAH P. WALSWORTH.

Received October, 1894.

Accessions No. 57776. Class No.

DE
ny-

A BOOK FOR THE TIMES.

SPOTS

IN OUR

FEASTS OF CHARITY.

BEING AN EXPOSURE OF THE DELINQUENCIES OF CHRISTIAN
PROFESSORS IN REGARD TO THE ORDINANCES OF RELI-
GION AND OTHER AGENCIES FOR DOING GOOD.

BY

REV. WILLIAM M. THAYER,

AUTHOR OF "HINTS FOR THE HOUSEHOLD," ETC.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION,

By JACOB IDE, D. D.

"These are spots in your feasts of charity."—JUNE 12.

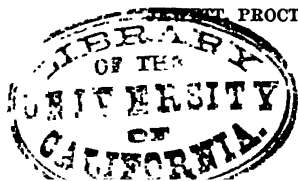
BOSTON:

PUBLISHED BY JOHN P. JEWETT AND COMPANY.

CLEVELAND, OHIO:

PROCTOR, AND WORTHINGTON.

1854.



BV4525
T5

57775

Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1854, by

JOHN P. JEWETT AND COMPANY,

In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Massachusetts.

STEREOTYPED AT THE
BOSTON STEREOTYPE FOUNDRY.

20

PREFACE.

"THE ways of Zion do mourn because" so few "come to her solemn feasts." This language of the "weeping prophet" is upon the lips of many faithful pastors. Neglect of the ordinary means of grace and of the various agencies for prosecuting the work of Christ is well nigh universal. The great body of believers seem not to appreciate the obligations that are imposed upon them in this regard. They conduct as if it were entirely a matter of choice whether the ordinances of religion are sustained by their presence. Hence the origin of this volume. What the author has seen and heard of the delinquencies of Christian professors in relation to religious or-

dinances and other means of usefulness, as well as the fact that no work of such a character is before the public, suggested the preparation of this book.

As the title indicates, the chief design of this volume is to expose the delinquencies of church members in respect to the several subjects discussed. The only exceptions are the seventh and eighth chapters, which are designed rather to discuss the importance of those agencies, and press their claims upon the Christian's attention.

This work contains only the *mortality* of religion; and the reader should beware that he does not substitute this for religion itself. There is both the *form* and the *spirit* of godliness. The former may exist without the latter; but the latter cannot actively exist without producing the former. While religion does not consist simply in the observance of rites, its genuine life in the soul will not fail to render its possessor faithful in this particular. Though an unconverted person may rigidly observe the means of grace whose claims are urged in this work, yet the Christian will never neglect

and forsake them unless he is a very poor representative of Christianity. There may be morality without religion; but there is no true religion without morality. And this is a sufficient defence of the plan and publication of this volume.

W. M. T.

1 *



INTRODUCTION.

WHEN important agencies are in operation for the advancement of a great and good cause, it becomes every individual to make himself acquainted with their nature and tendency, and to examine well his own position respecting them. Whether those which are the subjects of remark in the work before us meet our approval or not, it cannot be denied that the influence which they are exerting upon the cause of religion at the present day gives them a just demand upon our most serious attention.

A part of the institutions considered in the present work are of divine appointment, the utility of which no believer in the Scriptures can question. "The church," "the prayer meeting," "public wor-

ship," "the Lord's supper," "the missionary enterprise," are all either expressly or impliedly inculcated in the word of God. Nor will any intelligent Christian deny the fact that these instrumentalities are among the most efficient means by which the religion of Christ is now, and has been from the first, promoted in the world. No man ought to allow himself to remain ignorant of the nature, the design, and the probable consequences of these institutions, or the duties which devolve on him in respect to them. With an intimate and practical knowledge of these things must every man's usefulness and enjoyment in life be more or less connected. But to the Christian — one who has professedly associated himself with the church of Christ, and who sincerely desires to honor the Savior and to promote his cause in the world — this knowledge must be deemed invaluable. There cannot be a full and honorable discharge of the duties belonging to his high vocation without it.

As it respects the "Sabbath school," the "maternal association," the "missionary sewing circle," and other associations and instrumentalities named in this work, if they are not *authoritatively required* by the word of God, they are evidently means of

doing good which his *providence* has indicated, and on which he is known repeatedly to have bestowed his choicest blessings. It is an error to suppose that every duty binding upon Christians is expressly inculcated in the word of God. This could not be done without increasing the sacred volume to a size which would render it useless to the multitude. The wants of individuals, the circumstances of the times, the movements of Providence often indicate not only the usefulness of a particular measure, but the will of God that it should be adopted. The man who doubts the utility of the "Sabbath school," the "maternal association," or the "preparatory lecture," at this age, and in the present circumstances of the world, has a degree of scepticism in his composition, which, in other circumstances, might show itself in open infidelity, and which may, even under the restraints of his present position, yet make such developments as to evince that he really has no confidence in the teachings of either the providence or the word of God.

Without attempting to decide whether the associations above named are the *best* means which can be adopted to attain the ends in view or not, we may be satisfied that they are instrumentalities of great

importance, which, while we know of no better, it is our duty to use with the utmost constancy and faithfulness. Those who attend upon these means of moral and religious improvement, in connection with the positive institutions of the gospel, with earnestness and fidelity, and those who are actively engaged in them for the benefit of others, are known to grow in grace faster, and to become more distinguishingly useful, than others who treat them with comparative indifference and neglect. The too frequent neglect of these means of doing and getting good, and the very careless and faulty manner in which they are sometimes attended, are evils which almost every pastor is compelled to witness, and over which he sighs and groans. This negligence, and its consequent pernicious effects upon the character of professors as well as others, are "SPOTS IN OUR FEASTS OF CHARITY" which ought to be wiped out and seen no more. To call attention to these delinquencies, to lead the members of our churches to consider more seriously the "price that is put into their hands to get wisdom," and to make them realize more fully the responsibility which rests upon them in regard to the improvement of their privileges, is the object of the work

now presented to the reader. The author has thoroughly considered his subjects. He writes like one who has been called to meet the evils which he exposes, and has seen the good effects of the measures which he recommends.

These discourses are suited to interest as well as to instruct the reader. The positions taken by the author are well sustained by arguments drawn both from reason and Scripture, and happily illustrated by a rich variety of anecdotes. The style in which the work is written is the author's own—easy, lucid, attractive.

Such a work as this is needed. It supplies an important place, which is filled by no other within my knowledge. It will be useful, not only to those who have had many years of experience and observation in the divine life, but particularly to *young* Christians who are just entering upon their course. It will aid them in the formation of right habits at the beginning.

In a work like this, touching upon so great a variety of topics relating to the order of our churches and the duties of individual members, some things may be found which do not meet the views of every one. The author has expressed his own convic-



tions honestly and with plainness, hoping that they will be thoroughly *examined* — *adopted*, if found in accordance with truth; *rejected*, if seen to be based upon any species of falsehood. It is confidently believed, however, that the views here expressed will meet with the general approval of evangelical Christians every where. If there should be any exceptions in the case, those who differ from the author will not find the difference so great as, even in *their* view, essentially to diminish the usefulness of the work. It is commended to the perusal and the prayers of all who love our Lord Jesus Christ, with the earnest desire and hope that it may prove an important instrumentality of advancing the great interests of his kingdom.

JACOB IDE.

MEDWAY, December, 1853.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PUBLIC WORSHIP.—Delinquencies and Duties of Christian Professors relating to. — Extract from Rev. J. A. James. — The fair-weather Disciple. — The half-day Disciple. — The inconstant Disciple. — The tardy Disciple. — The listless Disciple. — The sleeping Disciple. — Duty demands the constant Attendance of professing Christians on public Worship. — Countess of Burford. — Excuses considered. — Slight Indisposition. — Fatigue. — Christian Disciple should be the most attentive Listener. — Sleeping in Church discussed more particularly. — Whispering, Reading, and kindred Misdemeanors in Service Time, 19

CHAPTER II.

PRAYER MEETING.—Observed by different Denominations. — Not subject of direct Commandment. — Small Attendance upon. — Statistics. — Incongruity between Profession and Practice in this Respect. — Excuses considered. — Distance from Place of Prayer. — Family Cares. — Pressure of Busi-

ness. — Fatigue. — Cannot take active Part. — Meetings are dull and uninteresting. — Hostility to the Pastor. — Habit. — Not unpopular to stay away. — Good Plan for Members detained to devote a Portion of the same Hour to Prayer. — Sabbath Evening Prayer Meeting. — Neglecting. Prayer Meeting not Proof of Hypocrisy. — Thomas Absent from Prayer Meeting. — The Prayer Meeting needs you. — You need the Prayer Meeting, 37

CHAPTER III.

CHURCH MEETING. — Custom of Churches. — Object of this Meeting twofold: 1. Business; 2. Devotional Exercises. — Importance of. — Demands Interest of all. — Non-Attendance. — Some so ignorant of Church Affairs as not to know when a Brother is under Discipline. — Important Case of Discipline will not call some Members to Meeting. — Irresponsibility. — Sad Consequences resulting. — Compels a few to assume the Responsibility of doing Business. — Delays Action to the Reproach of Religion. — Church in B—. — Another Case. — Often followed by Difficulties and Strife. — Church in S—. — Another Case. — Supposed Cases. — Duty plain. — Remarks of Rev. Albert Barnes, 57

CHAPTER IV.

PREPARATORY LECTURE, AND LORD'S SUPPER. — The Lord's Supper a simple Ordinance. — Observed in Remembrance of Christ. — Men always sought to perpetuate Memory. — Christ had Reference to this Element of Human Nature. — His Plan differs from that of Men in Simplicity. — Founded on Law of Association. — How important and solemn this Sacrament. — Hence the Custom of observing a preparatory Season. — Communicants' Prayer Meeting. — Lecture useful. — Best Plan should be adopted. — Preparatory Lecture poorly attended. — Members do not prepare for Lord's Supper. — Ab-

bott's Remarks. — Providence only should detain them from this Ordinance. — Should not stay away because of personal Difficulties with Members, or because there are wicked Persons in the Church. — "When they had sung a Hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives," 76

CHAPTER V.

CHURCH AND PARISH. — Collision between them. — Object of Parish Organization frequently defeated. — Debts contracted and Expenses unpaid. — Sanctuaries mortgaged. — Some obliged to pay more than their proportional Part. — Ministers' Salaries unpaid. — Credit of Parish impaired. — Hence Parish and Church dilatory. — Irresponsible. — Duty of Believers and Unbelievers to support Gospel. — Parish is the Organization of Necessity. — Every Church Member ought to pay his proportional Part. — Should also belong to the Parish. — Address to Young Men. — Conclusion, 93

CHAPTER VI.

SABBATH SCHOOL. — What has it done? — What will it do? — These Questions answered. — Important Agency in the Salvation of the World. — Hence the Relation of the Church to the Sabbath School. — General Complaints about Lack of Interest in. — Duties of professing Christians relating to. — They themselves should be Members. — They should see that their Children are Members. — Should be willing to become Teachers. — Should pray for it. — Not allow it to supersede religious Instruction at Home, 112

CHAPTER VII.

MISSIONARY SEWING CIRCLE. — Character of Dorcas. — Female Influence in the Missionary Enterprise. — Benefits of

Sewing Circle. — It affords Opportunity for social Inter-
course. — For intellectual Improvement. — Benefits the Par-
ticipant morally and spiritually. — Furnishes Means to
spread the Gospel. — Statistics showing Amount contributed
by Sewing Circles. — Three Evils to avoid. — Levity and
Worldliness. — Discord. — Converting Association into a
Tattling Society. — Appeal to Females. — Dorcas a "Sister
of Charity," 131

CHAPTER VIII.

MATERNAL ASSOCIATION. — Power of Association. — Origin
of Maternal Association. — Design of it. — Power of Moth-
ers' Encouragement to. — The Opinion of a South American
Statesman. — Mothers of Bishop Hall, John Quincy Adams,
Knill, Todd, and Cowper. — Benefits of Maternal Associa-
tion. — Creates Sympathy between Mothers thus associated.
— Imparts Knowledge of best Mode of Parental Discipline.
— Increases Sense of Parental Responsibility. — Makes more
faithful. — Report of London Maternal Association. — God
has blessed this Meeting to the Salvation of many. — A Fact.
— Statistics of Conversions gathered from Reports. — Ap-
peal to Mothers, 149

CHAPTER IX.

THE MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE. — Will the World be con-
verted? — Small Contributions imply it will not. — Contribu-
tions not increase in Proportion to Wealth. — The Pleasure
Excursion. — Only one Half Cent given daily. — Family of
Six Hundred Millions. — Few perceive that giving is for their
good. — Little System in giving. — Hammond, Baxter, Dod-
dridge, and others. — The Shoemaker. — Christians wait to
give. — Opposition to Agents. — Ingenuity and Effort neces-
sary to obtain a liberal Contribution — Complain because so

many Calls. — Some plead that "Charity begins at Home." — Refuse to give because of some Case of Imposition. — "We know not that the Money reaches the Heathen." — Some cry, "To what Purpose is this Waste?" — Curtailing Contributions instead of Expenses. — Some give only when cannot help it. — The Mite. — The small Gift, rich Entertainment, and splendid House. — The selfish Christian praying "Thy Kingdom come." — Giving a Test of Piety. — The burning Turf. — The Soldier. — Who is benevolent? — Get to give, . 168

CHAPTER X.

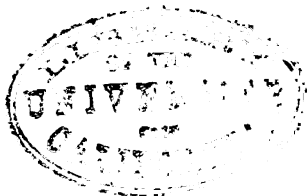
MUTUAL CHRISTIAN FAITHFULNESS. — The Bible View. — How disregarded, and why. — Lack of moral Courage. — Fear of giving Offence. — Little Interest in spiritual Welfare of Church. — Benefits of this Fidelity. — Inspires Confidence in the faithful Disciple. — Begets Watchfulness. — Spares the Church much unpleasant Discipline. — Preserves Purity of Church, and gives Power over Men. — Spirit that ought to pervade the Church on this Subject. — A faithful Friend, 194

CHAPTER XI.

CHRISTIAN CONDUCT IN REGARD TO THE FOREGOING TESTED BY PRAYER. — Prayer in the Ball Room. — Prayer for pernicious Fiction. — For Card Playing. — For Theatre-going. Rumseller's Prayer. — May go boldly to Mercy Seat with innocent Things. — Herein Prayer is a marked Test of Christian Conduct. — The Christian should not persevere in a Course of Conduct upon which he cannot invoke the divine Blessing. — The Church Member neglecting Public Worship. — The Prayer-Meeting Absentee. — The Church-Meeting Absentee. — Absence from the Lord's Supper. — Delinquencies in refusing to pay proportional Part, to contribute gen-

erously for Missionary Purposes, and Want of Fidelity, all tested. — Contradiction between Prayer and Practice ; why ? — Prayer a Test of Conduct in regard to other Things. — Appeal to Christian Professors. — Conclusion, 208

APPENDIX, 229



CHAPTER I.

PUBLIC WORSHIP.

Delinquencies and Duties of Christian Professors relating to. — Extract from Rev. J. A. James. — The fair-weather Disciple. — The half-day Disciple. — The inconstant Disciple. — The tardy Disciple. — The listless Disciple. — The sleeping Disciple. — Duty demands the constant Attendance of professing Christians on public Worship. — Countess of Burford. — Excuses considered. — Slight Indisposition. — Fatigue. — Christian Disciple should be the most attentive Listener. — Sleeping in Church discussed more particularly. — Whispering, Reading, and kindred Misdemeanors in Service Time.

THE object of this chapter is not to exhibit the benefits of public worship, but to expose the DELINQUENCIES and discuss the DUTIES of Christian professors in respect to attendance thereupon. There is a looseness of conduct in this regard which poorly comports with a religious profession. The following remarks of an English divine* upon this subject, though penned with special reference to Christians residing in the city, I quote entire, for their interest, and general application to the church: "A general,

* Rev. John Angell James.

regular, and punctual attendance upon all the means of grace is essential to the earnestness of a Christian church. There is a wonderful difference in this respect in the various congregations of professing Christians. In some instances you will see the hearers straggling along with a dull and careless look, as if they were going to an unwelcome service — dropping into the place of worship long after the service has commenced — looking round with vacant stare upon the congregation — undevout and listless, as if they were there they knew nor cared for why; the seats half empty, and those that occupied them seemingly neither expecting nor desiring a blessing from above. There is no earnestness there. In other cases, how different! You will observe a stream of people, just *before* the hour of service, flowing into the place, with a serious, thoughtful, yet cheerful air, as if they knew what they were going for, and that it was a solemn yet gladsome occasion. They take their seats with a composed, collected, devout manner. A look of expectation is in their eye, which is first cast towards the pulpit, as if they waited for the preacher, with his message from God, and then upward to that God who alone can make the message effectual. A stranger, coming in, is struck with the appearance of earnestness that pervades the congregation, and almost involuntarily exclaims, ‘How dreadful is this place! Surely this is the house of God and the gate

of heaven!’ Yes; and if he were to visit that place, time after time, he would see the same scene repeated, the same seats occupied by the same people, and in the same devout manner. The earnest hearer is the constant hearer, the punctual hearer, the devout hearer. There is a spirit of indolence, self-indulgence, and mischievous negligence creeping over the churches, most fatal to fervent devotion, in reference even to the Sabbath-day attendance, which is rising out of the modern taste for residing in the country. Very many of the members of our religious communities, of all denominations, go but once a week to the house of God; and this is on a Sabbath morning. All the rest of the holy day is spent in idleness — perhaps feasting and lounging over the wine through the afternoon — turning over the pages of a magazine, with little devotion and no profit, in the evening. If these persons were in their closets, studying the word of God; engaged in self-examination and prayer, mortifying their corruptions and invigorating their graces, we should think less of it; but is this their occupation? I fear this love of ease is eating out the piety of our churches, and gradually turning the Sabbath into a day of luxurious repose, instead of Christian devotion. Modern tastes are sadly at war with modern piety. It seems as if many of the professing Christians of the day were trying with how little attendance upon the ordinances of public worship, how little of self-denial,

and how little a public manifestation of their religion could satisfy their conscience ; and, alas ! how very little that is !”

This somewhat lengthy quotation presents, in the main, the object of this chapter. Although its points of special pungency relate only to professors of religion in metropolitan districts, yet, in regard to negligence in attending upon public worship, they equally apply to many Christian professors in rural towns.

I surely need not spend a moment in proving that it is the *duty* of the members of our churches to attend upon the services of the sanctuary. Were the Scriptures wholly silent upon the subject, and the example of primitive saints foreign to the question, still the countless blessings which have been scattered far and wide by the observance of public worship are sufficient to define the church member's duty in this regard ; for the professing Christian, if any one, ought to lend his example and influence to whatever is lovely and of good report. If it is the duty of any persons to support this ordinance by constant and punctual attendance, it certainly is the duty of those who have voluntarily taken upon themselves the vows of God.

The delinquencies of church members in relation to this subject are somewhat various. All delinquents are not guilty of the same neglect. Some are negligent in one way, and some in another. In

order to present the subject fairly, and show that the foregoing charges are not made without ample reasons, the reader's attention is directed to the following classification of delinquents.

THE FAIR-WEATHER DISCIPLE. — That the church embraces members who seldom think of worshipping God publicly upon a stormy Sabbath is proved abundantly by empty pews. The preacher usually may determine with considerable exactness, on the morning of a stormy Sabbath, who of his church will not be present. A few months' experience in the ministry will make him quite a prophet in this respect; and it would not surprise him at all if the hearers, at such times, were the members of his church, and *unbelievers* only the absentees. But the facts in the case show him that some of his people, who make no pretensions to piety, are present, "rain or shine," while some of his church are absent. It is freely admitted that a storm may be a sufficient excuse for some professors to remain at home; but, after granting all the exceptions consistent with Christian propriety, many are verily guilty in limiting their attendance to cloudless Sabbaths. It is evident, in almost every church, that it does not require a very violent storm to detain some of its members at home. There is not that conscientious regard to Christian example, in this particular, which ought to distinguish those who are to be ensamples to the world.

THE HALF-DAY DISCIPLE. — Domestic cares, impaired health, and kindred hinderances may render a half-day visit to the house of God unavoidable. Reference is had only to those members of the church who *unnecessarily* pay but a half-day service to God. Such there are. They may be very careful to attend upon *one* service every Lord's day, and might do it really as a matter of conscience ; but the neglect of the other service does not appear to trouble conscience at all. In cities, it is often a kind of *fashion* to pay only morning devotions to God in the sanctuary. In the country it is not so much the fashion as it is a tyrannizing habit. It may be difficult to decide which of the two is more sinful, though it must be admitted that the first is the more singular. To subject religion, in any measure, to the control of custom or fashion might be consistent with the profession of a pagan, but is not with that of a Christian. If it is important for any persons that two services be observed on the Sabbath, then it is important for the Christian professor ; and is not he, if any one, in duty bound to sustain both services by his presence ?

THE INCONSTANT DISCIPLE. — Those already named are inconstant ; but we refer to those who, fair weather or foul, summer or winter, maintain no order, system, or rule in their attendance. They are not *periodical* hearers, for in this there is system and order. They may be present constantly for quite

a period, then absent twice as long, or *vice versa*. They may worship formally one half day, then be missing three. They are sometimes absent through the day, and present at the evening service. In short, they are so irregular in their attendance that no dependence can be placed upon them. They do not appear to regard the public worship of God so much a duty as a *convenience*. Their conduct seems to say to the world, "The sanctuary is a very convenient place to visit when inclination favors." It deserves to be gratefully recorded that this class numbers less than the preceding.

THE TARDY DISCIPLE. — He may not be many minutes too late, but late enough to disturb the devotions of the congregation. For a moment, at least, all eyes must be directed to him, and a consequent sensation, if not a noise, created through the house. Such delinquents do well to remember the principle of a devoted Christian female, who replied to the inquiry, how she managed, amid so many domestic cares and duties, always to be so punctual in attendance upon the service of the Lord's house, "It is a part of my religion not to disturb the religion of others."

THE LISTLESS DISCIPLE. — There is quite a difference in the attention which different hearers render in the sanctuary. It is delightful to preach to some, and a sore trial to preach to others. While many are eager to catch every word that falls from the

preacher's lips, and listen with profoundest attention, here and there is one gazing about the house, tumbling the leaves of a hymn book, now lounging in a corner of the pew, then sitting in restless uprightness, and, on the whole, apparently determined not to hear. Such demeanor in the house of God is unbecoming even in the unbeliever, and in the professing Christian it is highly censurable. Yet such there are in the church of Christ. Their example we shall analyze in another place.

THE SLEEPING DISCIPLE. — Unavoidable cares and toils through the week, deprivation of nightly rest, age, and disease may excuse some for sleeping in the house of God; but there are professing Christians who indulge the inclination to sleep without the shadow of an excuse. They offer no resistance to the approach of the somnolent spell; they place themselves in a position to invite the overpowering stupor; they yield themselves up to the power of the soporific influence as willing slaves; they lose the identity of *hearers* in that of *sleepers*. Their appearance is that of non-interest and spiritual declension.

Such is a brief, imperfect view of the DELINQUENCIES of professing Christians in regard to attendance upon public worship. The influence of such an example upon unbelievers will appear as we proceed to discuss the DUTIES of church members in relation to this subject.

Duty demands that church members should *always* attend the Sabbath worship. This should be their rule, to which there may be reasonable exceptions, since there are exceptions to all rules. Excuses which are sufficient to detain the non-professor at home may not be sufficient to detain the Christian. It does not become the latter to allow himself to be controlled by trifling considerations in a matter of so much importance. He should have more regard to the influence of his example. Although religion is something more than this simple morality, yet that is a very poor religion which thinks to live without it. Morality and religion beautifully harmonize in the character of him whose heart is right in the sight of God. The example of a Christian so devoted as the Countess of Burford, in regard to attendance upon public worship, has a powerful influence upon both the church and the world. For the last few years of her life, the countess was obliged to ride on horseback more than sixteen miles to her place of worship; yet it is said of her, "Neither frost, snow, rain, nor bad roads were sufficient to detain her at home, nor to prevent her being there before the worship began."* The influence of her constant and punctual attendance upon the public means of grace was apparent on every hand. It was creditable to her religious pro-

* Arvine.

fession; it was expressive of sincerity and a pious heart in the view of numerous beholders; it was honorable to religion.

So will it be with every Christian who conscientiously observes the public worship of God. If his seat is constantly filled in the house of God, it is one thing towards disseminating a healthful influence in the place where he resides. It is one ray of that bright example, which he is obligated to set. On the other hand, if he unnecessarily absents himself from the sanctuary, — if lowering weather, or a slight indisposition, is excuse enough to detain him at home while some of his unconverted neighbors are promptly in their pews, — it is a stain upon his Christian character, which tears of penitence alone can wash away. No one could be surprised that the scoffer should make capital out of such a delinquency to promote his diabolical aims. No one could complain if the unbeliever should say, "If the members of the church may innocently plead such slight excuses for non-attendance upon public worship, then may not I?"

Certain excuses, often rendered, demand a more particular discussion. *Weariness, excessive fatigue*, in consequence of the toils of the week, sometimes detain church members from the house of God. Ordinarily, is it right? Will the excuse stand when brought to the test of Christian principles? Unhesitatingly we reply, No! The circumstances of need

in which Providence places a Christian disciple, so as to oblige him to toil to such a degree as to unfit him for Sabbath worship, seldom occur. One seventh part of his time belongs, in a peculiar sense, to God. If he consecrates it to his service, even in the face of haggard want, we believe that the great Giver of all things will not leave him to starvation.* But the question which every Christian needs especially to settle is, whether he is not guilty of a moral wrong in so exhausting his physical energies through the week that he has little life or strength to devote to God upon the Sabbath. Is not this converting the Lord's day into a *recruiting* season, when the weary body may become refreshed and prepared for worldly duties on Monday morning? In such instances, is the Sabbath more than a convenient day for rest from physical toil, in order that the worldly business of the following week may be prosecuted with greater alacrity? Is it any thing more than a sort of *station* in the hurrying, rushing train of life's business, where a stop is made mainly to replenish wood and water? If so, God is cheated out of every moment of time; not an hour is really consecrated to his service; for, "to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" means something more than rest from hard toil at home. It signifies an absolute consecration of the time to religious purposes,

* See Appendix, A.

and nothing else, except works of pressing necessity.

Brief reference has been¹ made to the fact that *slight indisposition* is regarded an excuse by some professors of religion for neglecting this means of grace. This is an excuse so common, as well as plausible, that it deserves some attention. It is doubtless true that many church members allow a degree of illness, which would not interfere with their business on weekdays, to detain them from the house of God on the Sabbath. Or perhaps the same illness on any other day of the week, though interrupting their manual labors, would not interfere with their sitting for hours in the stores and shops. A physician, who has been in the medical practice nearly forty years, remarked to me, in substance, "I have always had more calls upon the Sabbath than on any other day of the week. I have noticed, to my surprise, that even Christian people would be ailing the last part of the week, yet keep about their work until SUNDAY, and then send for me, because it was a day of rest. They did not appear to doubt that they fulfilled the divine commandment if they only rested from their labors." Of course, such a practice cannot be defended for a moment by reason or Scripture. It is a downright desecration of the Sabbath, because it is getting sick in their own time, and taking the Lord's for getting

well. It is a deliberate calculation to make the most of weekdays for worldly purposes, to the virtual disregard of holy time. No mantle of charity is ample enough to cover such a sin.

In such examples as the above there is supposed to be actual sickness that requires medical aid ; and were it not for the circumstances in which the sickness was begotten, it would be no desecration of the Lord's day. Surely, then, bodily indisposition, so slight as not to abate physical labor on other days of the week, in common parlance, called "*Sunday sickness*," cannot excuse a church member from public worship. He as really fails to fulfil the fourth commandment as he who endures illness all the week in order to perform his work, and seek medical aid on Sunday.

Again : the professing Christian *ought to be the most attentive listener in the sanctuary*. If one person is a better hearer than another, that person ought to be the church member. Unbelievers often go to the house of God to see and be seen ; but the Christian professor goes, or *should* go, to worship God. Let others be as listless and irreverent as they may, *he* should be alive to the solemn import of sanctuary duties. That sinners should be inattentive and restless is not so strange ; but that Christ's disciple, professing a deep concern in the gospel, should be careless and indifferent when it is proclaimed, is stranger than fiction.

Mark more particularly the unchristian influence of such a professor. He enters the house of worship amid all the solemnities of the Lord's day. He is there known as one who ought, out of regard to his profession at least, to sympathize deeply with the preacher in his efforts to save men. But he is manifestly little interested in the truth proclaimed, and spends his time in a sort of indifference, interspersed with an occasional manœuvre, such as handling a book, paring finger nails, lounging in the pew, and kindred misdemeanors. Perhaps he is not exactly in love with his pastor,* and he allows the feeling to develop itself in a kind of indifferent, dissatisfied air, the most marked feature being a determination, *not to be interested*. Near by an unbeliever sits, an eye witness to the painful scene, and he has generally intelligence enough to make his own inferences. He is, himself, a more attentive and reverent hearer. He would dread the reputation of being listless and irreverent in the sanctuary. In this respect his example is a good one for the unseemly professor, described, to copy. But, while the preacher is discussing the plan of life, the worth of the soul, or other important topics, this unbelieving hearer reasons, "If a Christian may be inattentive and indifferent, surely a sinner is quite excusable in being a mere spectator instead of a worshipper.

* Appendix, B.

That professor's conduct does not appear to make the theme of the discourse so important as the preacher declares it to be. There must be some delusion in religion, or some inconsistency in that Christian disciple's conduct." And who can wonder at his reasoning? Is it strange if he passes some withering criticisms? Does not such demeanor in the sanctuary, by a member of the church, furnish *occasion* for the sceptic to hurl his missiles? It would be strange indeed if some unconverted hearer did not make it the subject of cavilling remark. We wonder that it does not leave a scarlet stain upon religion in the view of impenitent hearers; we wonder that it does not oftener repel them from reflection upon eternal realities; and, most of all, we wonder that such an erring professor himself does not behold his inconsistency.

Reference has been had to the SLEEPING disciple; and, in order that we might not appear to lack in charity, it has been admitted that excusable instances of it may occur. The subject deserves additional remark concerning the view which Christian professors ought to take of it. First of all, the disciple of Christ should feel that it is not an unimportant matter—that his example may become a pillow on which the conscience of the unbeliever may slumber. If he indulges the sentiment that it will make no material difference with his influence whether he is awake or asleep, or if he is so indif-

ferent to the character of his example as not to revolve the matter at all, he will not be likely to oppose a strong resistance to the inclination to sleep. On the other hand, if he views it in a *serious* light, this alone will nerve him somewhat against the powerful spell. He should also consider how God regards *unnecessary* sleep in his earthly temple. God knows, in each instance, whether it admits of a plausible excuse or not. To him the vows of the disciple are to be performed. Hence, when a Christian enters the sanctuary to indulge in a sleep which he might resist, it must appear peculiarly irreverent in the sight of the King of heaven. If a person were to enter into the presence of an earthly king or governor, with the professed object of honoring him, it would not be regarded a very respectful audience if he should fall into deep sleep while in his presence. How much more irreverent is slumber, which might be resisted, when we enter the place of worship to pay our vows to the most high God!

Christian disciples should study to learn the cause of their inclination to sleep in the sanctuary. If the cause be excessive toil through the week, no remedy is at hand except to toil less. If it be slothfulness and surfeiting, then early rising and abstemiousness will bring relief. If it be an unventilated or an over-heated house, the remedy is readily suggested. If it be a habit, though binding with fetters of brass, there is mental and physical energy enough,

if unimpaired, to destroy it. If it be an attitude favorable to repose, then another posture can easily be assumed. And if it be a lack of interest in the religious services, then earnest prayer and self-examination will soon remove it.

There may be more virtue in the act of some in resisting the stealthy approach of sleep in the house of God than is usually supposed. There are those who are always wakeful. In whatever place they are, this intolerable lassitude never steals upon them. Perhaps Providence has allotted them a sphere in life where they are comparatively strangers to care and wearisome toil; or, constitutionally, they may be better prepared to render wakeful attention. Of course, the virtue of preserving a wakeful interest in all such examples is far less marked than where one is compelled to summon all his energies to resist the drowsy influence. The virtue of the resistance is proportioned to the strength of the insidious spell.

Need I add that whispering and laughing in the sanctuary is inconsistent with a Christian profession? The non-professor, even, who thus demeans himself in the place of worship, is highly censurable, and much more the member of the church. Need I add that reading even a religious paper, or studying a Sabbath school lesson during service time, is a delinquency in the follower of Christ? It is not for such an object that the sanctuary is reared, or Christians assemble. It is well to be prepared for

the Sabbath school; but it is better, far better, to neglect it entirely than to prepare one's self amid the devotions of the temple of God.

In conclusion, the whole demeanor of the follower of Christ in the house of God should savor of profound *reverence*. Not an act or look should be indulged which would indicate a light, trifling spirit, nor be unsafe for the unbeliever to copy. "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him."

CHAPTER II.

PRAYER MEETING.

Observed by different Denominations. — Not subject of direct Commandment. — Small Attendance upon. — Statistics. — Incongruity between Profession and Practice in this Respect. — Excuses considered. — Distance from Place of Prayer. — Family Cares. — Pressure of Business. — Fatigue. — Cannot take active Part. — Meetings are dull and uninteresting. — Hostility to the Pastor. — Habit. — Not unpopular to stay away. — Good Plan for Members detained to devote a Portion of the same Hour to Prayer. — Sabbath Evening Prayer Meeting. — Neglecting Prayer Meeting not Proof of Hypocrisy. — Thomas Absent from Prayer Meeting. — The Prayer Meeting needs you. — You need the Prayer Meeting.

EVER since the days of the primitive church, professing Christians, of different denominations, have seen eye to eye in respect to the meeting for social prayer and conference. Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and others have maintained that it is essential to preserve a good degree of spirituality among Christian professors. Experience and observation have corroborated the views which have hitherto been promulgated respecting this means of grace. For centuries it has been apparent that this meeting

is the spiritual pulse of the church. It has been poorly or well attended, devotional or formal, dull or interesting, according to the state of religion among the people of God. If there is unusual awakening among the followers of Christ, it is first manifest in the place of social prayer. If icy coldness chills the hearts of believers, here the unwelcome truth is revealed. The pastor has often learned the religious state of his church, to his joy or sorrow, from this weekly gathering of the saints for social communion. Hence his deep solicitude for the prosperity of this religious service. Few know the anxiety of his heart as he wends his way, at evening, to the place of prayer, almost fearing to look in upon the assembled number, lest their paucity reveal the deadness of his church. O that he might *depend* upon professors of religion to sustain and enjoy this service!

True, no *direct commandment* is found in the Scriptures concerning this meeting; neither is there any express commandment to keep holy the *first* day of the week, nor to attend *two* services upon the Sabbath; yet all Christians feel this to be their duty, because it promotes vital piety, and is honorable to the cause of Christ. The truth is, many of our plainest duties are not the subject of direct command, but are to be inferred from general principles laid down in the Scriptures. "*Forsaking not the assembling of ourselves together.*" "*Where two or three*

are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." The pious heart finds no difficulty in construing such texts as these to favor the weekly prayer meeting. It does not require more positive injunctions than these to define duty or privilege. Admitting that the Bible does not contain a command or principle to make it a *duty* to sustain it, little can be said in favor of that Christian professor's piety who will not yield to the argument of *privilege*. If it be not a fellowship and communion ample to promote any Christian's enjoyment to assemble with "brethren beloved"

"Before our Father's throne
To pour our ardent prayers,"

then cold must be his affections, and doubtful his title to everlasting mansions. We believe that every devout and holy heart responds to the hymn which begins, —

"Sweet the time, exceeding sweet,
When the saints together meet,
When the Savior is the theme,
When they join to sing of him!"

A writer has very happily said, "To object to meetings that tend to edification — to doubt their obligation because not expressly commanded — demonstrates the low standard of the objector's piety; as if every step beyond the measured way were unwillingly trodden, every farthing above the stipulated payment grudged. The language, fairly in-

terpreted, is this: 'I cannot find it in my heart to serve God beyond a given point; that ascertained, all the rest is my own.' And is this Christian experience? Is this love? Is this 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth I desire beside thee'? Cold indeed must be the heart that can reason thus, and apply the stipulations of worldly policy to the service of Him who loved us and gave himself for us."

Even a short acquaintance with our churches reveals a censurable delinquency on the part of their members in respect to the prayer meeting. It is not sustained as it ought to be. Only a small portion of the body of believers in any community give it their personal support. A fractional part of their numbers only is ever seen at this service. It is true, doubtless, that there are persons in our churches who have never attended such a meeting since they first united with the body of Christ. It is a sad and serious charge to bring; but we fully believe it can be substantiated by facts within the pale of almost every church. I have made myself familiar, in this particular, with the statistics of several churches, and found the facts to be as follows:—

In a church of 200 members, an average of about 35 at the prayer meeting.

"	"	172	"	"	"	25	"	"
"	"	130	"	"	"	18	"	"
"	"	300	"	"	"	50	"	"
"	"	180	"	"	"	30	"	"
"	"	120	"	"	"	40	"	"
"	"	30	"	"	"	10	"	"
"	"	500	"	"	"		"	"

on an evening when a little rain was falling. I counted *twelve* persons only.

In the above we have given round numbers, in order to save space and the introduction of fractions. On examination, they will be found to present a fair sample of the attendance upon this means of grace in our churches generally. There may be times when one fourth or one half of the church members are present; but such seasons are few and far between. After subtracting the number of children, non-professors, and members of other churches who are usually present, the lamentable truth is revealed, that in some churches *one fourth*, in others *one fifth*, and in others *one sixth* or *one seventh* of the members only are wont to attend. The above statistics show that small churches are best represented at the meeting for prayer; that the increase in attendance is not proportioned to the increase of the church. This is a general fact, painful as it is, as the true history of most churches will clearly exhibit. None of these things ought so to be. It is a marked dishonor to the cause we profess to love. It is evidence of a low state of piety, at once alarming and wicked. It is calculated to impress unfavorably our witnesses of the world. They will be likely to infer, from this lack of interest, that there is a lie in our profession or in our religion. And who can censure them? Who can declare that they disregard the rules of logical deduction in their inference? Who of Christ's flock

can meet their cavillings, without grief and shame that such an occasion for it should exist?

Let me illustrate by reference to things as they actually exist. The evening of the weekly prayer meeting has arrived. It is a pleasant evening even for females to go out. The deacons are in their places betimes, and Mr. A. and Mr. B. are not among the missing. A few of the sisters are there, with some three or four children, and several unbelievers. But, "all told," there is only a fractional part of the church. The minister sees an impenitent youth among the number, and the sight rejoices his heart, until he reflects upon the influence it may have upon the youth's mind to behold so few professing Christians present. He fears that he may say, "If saints do not value souls more highly than this thin attendance indicates, then *I* need not be alarmed for myself." He rises to read a hymn, and finds to his sorrow that this aspect of things contradicts almost every hymn he can find. If he reads that beautiful sentiment, —

"My gracious Lord, I own thy right
To every service I can pay," —

he perceives that it is practically denied by many of his flock, who might render God a service at the prayer meeting without inconvenience. Farther on he reads, —

"'Tis my delight thy face to see,
And serve the cause of such a friend."

And is this the way to show it? he asks himself. Is this a true index of the "delight" which believers have in the service of Christ? Then is this sentiment of a tone too heavenly for the church, as a body, to sing. Again he reads, —

"I would not breathe for worldly joy
Or to increase my worldly goods ;" —

yet several brethren are away in their stores, shops, counting rooms, and other places of business, all ready to excuse themselves because *their business is so pressing* ; thus openly giving the lie to the above sweet sentiment.

No candid Christian can contemplate the spiritual aspect of our churches, as revealed in the attendance upon the weekly season of prayer, without seeing that the devotional character of the poetry we sing is far in advance of the piety we possess. It seems, sometimes, as if it were a caricature upon religion to sing, —

"Religion is the chief concern
Of mortals here below," —

when seven eighths of the church scarcely think of participating in the exercises of this social meeting.

It is readily granted that good EXCUSES may exist for non-attendance upon this devotional service. Some of the more obvious excuses we shall consider.

THE DISTANCE OF A PERSON'S RESIDENCE FROM

THE PLACE OF PRAYER often detains him from the service. It may be a good excuse, especially when the meeting occurs in the evening; but it is necessary to regard the spiritual state of his mind, in order to ascertain the precise character of this excuse. If it is a trial, in any degree, to his feelings to absent himself, he has certainly a commendable interest in his heart. If his spiritual state is such that he would attend if his residence were less remote, then it appears like a good excuse. His *heart* is at the meeting. Though absent in body, he is present in spirit.

There are certain questions, however, it were well for such a Christian to ponder, in order to guide him to a proper decision. Should I forget the distance to attend a meeting of a different character? If my favorite political party were holding a series of meetings, would the *distance* detain me at home? Would a series of temperance meetings, equally distant, be sustained by my presence? Would the anti-slavery lecturer induce me to travel as far? Should I make this sacrifice (if such it may be called) to participate in scenes of pleasure — to be amused?

FAMILY CARES is another excuse, and, with many, a sufficient one in the sight of God and man. Says John Angell James, "Duties cannot be in opposition to each other. There is no religion in neglecting a dependent family, and allowing home to be a scene of confusion, even though it be to attend public wor-

ship; and if this must be the result, judgment and conscience being witnesses, your way is clear, and the place of your duty is home. But be quite sure that you could not, by method, diligence, preparation, and judicious delegation, attend to every duty at home, and yet have opportunity for one weekly visit 'at the sanctuary.' The same may be said in respect to the prayer meeting.

THE PRESSURE OF BUSINESS often leaves no time for attendance upon this means of grace. It is all some Christians can do to wind up their business on Saturday night, and be ready for the Sabbath worship, without devoting a single hour of the week to prayer and conference. We do not hesitate to affirm that such an excuse is generally unchristian. Is it not a Christian's duty to show to the world that religion is of more importance than amassing wealth? True, he has a duty to discharge at home in the support of his family; but beyond the absolute demands of this livelihood, is not a neglect of the means of grace for worldly gain a dishonor to his profession? Ought he not to regulate his temporal affairs so as to favor his spiritual interests? Is he doing right to consume so much time in worldly business that he cannot meet with the brethren one hour in a week to pray? Ought he not to economize his time so as to be able to devote a portion of a single evening on each week to God? If all the saints were thus

taxed by the calls of business, what would become of a perishing world?

FATIGUE, in consequence of the labors of the day, detains many. There are hard-toiling fathers and mothers in the church who possibly may be excused on this score. We would not affirm that such an excuse is never acceptable to Christ; yet, in all ordinary circumstances, such inquiries as the following may be raised: Is it right for a Christian professor to exhaust his energies in worldly pursuits, so that he has no strength remaining for the service of God? Ought he not to husband his energies with reference to the weekly service of God's people? Is any other policy consistent with a profession of religion?

Others absent themselves from the prayer meeting because THEY CANNOT TAKE AN ACTIVE PART IN THE EXERCISES. They are modest and timid, and distrust their ability to be active in this service. Then let their *silent* presence encourage the brethren who can speak and pray. It is cheering to pastor and the *praying* members of his flock to see the brethren attend the prayer circle, even though they are silent. It is encouraging to know that they love to be there, and that their hearts are in spiritual sympathy with those who do exhort and supplicate. There is power in the presence of a *mute* Christian, even. He adds *one* to the number; he helps fill the

vacant seats; he contributes his example to remove the painful void which often exists in such places of devotion; he disarms the caviller of a mighty weapon; he aids in removing the stigma from the church, that only a *fifth* or *sixth* part of the members are regular attendants upon this season of devotion. In short, he appears to better advantage as a professing Christian, both to saints and sinners.

THE MEETINGS ARE DULL AND VOID OF INTEREST. So say some delinquent Christians, and excuse themselves from attendance on this ground. It is worthy of remark, however, that this excuse is generally offered by those who seldom take an active part in these religious exercises. They are an unfortunate class, whose singular natures, too little moulded by grace, cause them to perceive defects in almost every exhortation and prayer they hear. To all such, the following counsel may be tendered. If the meetings are dull and uninteresting, then attend yourselves, take a part, *and make them interesting*. If the brethren do not pray or speak as they ought, then furnish them with an example worthy of imitation. Every pious brother would thank you with all his heart for such a beneficent service, and the minister's heart would overflow with gratitude. This complaining that the prayer meeting is dull and tedious, by one who never attempts to make it otherwise, is obnoxious to reason and Christian propriety; for duty requires that these persons employ

every energy to contribute to the general interest and profit of such gatherings.

DISAFFECTION with one or more of the brethren, and especially with the pastor, often leads the church member to neglect, and even utterly to abandon, the prayer meeting. It is the natural consequence of such alienation of feeling; for he who fosters such a temper of mind is unfitted to pray himself, or enjoy the prayers of others. If he were in the right himself, and possessed the proper spirit, he would be forgiving, and pray for those who are in the wrong. And certainly, if his conscience *did not* approve his course, he could have no heart to pray. Such an individual has a difficult case to defend before God. Let him take either horn of the dilemma, and he will not be able to escape censure. If others are guilty, so much the more need of praying *with* and *for* them. If he himself is guilty, then he ought to seek forgiveness on his bended knees, not only in his closet, but in the meeting for social prayer.

HABIT detains many. They have no particular excuse to present if interrogated upon this subject. Perhaps they cannot exactly tell why they do not attend. We apprehend, however, that, if the true reason were put into plain English, it would run somewhat as follows: "*We have staid at home, and therefore we continue to stay at home.*" It is a very censurable habit to form. It is indicative of a spiritual state of mind not altogether encouraging. It is

evidence of an alarming lack of interest, which ought to startle the professor into spiritual life and activity; for he must know that this "*dead sea*" state of mind is, of all things, to be dreaded. "It is the still water which becomes stagnant and impure; the running, moving streams are always clear. If you have steam machinery, you must work it, or it soon gets out of order. If you have a horse, you must exercise him; he is never so well as when he has regular work. If you would have good bodily health yourself, you must exercise. If you always sit still, your body is sure, at length, to complain. And just so it is with the soul. The active, moving mind is a hard mark for the devil to shoot at. Try to be always full of useful employment, and thus your enemy will find it difficult to get room to sow tares." *

There is a class of less important reasons which cause the members of churches to neglect the meeting for prayer, such as excessively hot or excessively cold weather, a degree of indisposition which does not detract an iota from the amount of their daily labor, the prospect of rain or snow, or an engagement elsewhere, which ought not to have been made. These and kindred excuses, frivolous as they are, we apprehend, after all, make our prayer meetings thin and dull.

* Ryle.

Popular sentiment does not attach such odium to neglect of social worship as to the neglect of public worship. It is not considered disreputable for a professing Christian to stay away from this service; but if he habitually absents himself from the sanctuary on the Sabbath it attaches disgrace to his character, and subjects him to church discipline. The followers of Christ should beware that the absence of this public odium to those who neglect the prayer meeting does not influence them to remain at home. Any such regard to public opinion, as the arbiter of Christian conduct, is censurable in the extreme.

That Providence may frequently detain members of the church from these devotional seasons, and, in some instances, excuse Christians wholly from attendance, we have admitted enough to show; but how careful ought Christians to be that *inclination* or *desire* do not lead them to interpret the designs of Providence to favor delinquency and sin! How interested should they be to act in accordance with truth and duty, that, when they may be interrogated respecting their absence from the meeting, they may be able to say, with honest convictions, "Providence detained me"!

We have often thought it would be a wise policy for the members of our churches to adopt, when necessarily detained from the prayer meeting, to remember in secret places their brothers and sisters

who have assembled. Very many at home, in every town and village, might find a few moments, during the hour which the brethren have devoted to prayer, in which to commune with God in behalf of the praying circle. We can scarcely conceive of a happier influence than such a practice would have upon the spiritual condition of the church. It would be emphatically girdling the town or village with the voice of supplication. It would give wings to the faith of those who are assembled to pray. It would present such a "strong crying unto God" as to secure the divine benediction.

The custom prevails with our churches to hold meetings for prayer and conference upon Sabbath evening. As what has been said already applies only to the weekday prayer meeting, we need to give a passing notice to this Sabbath evening exercise. It is not our object to speak of the propriety or sanction of this meeting, but simply, now that the service is very generally observed by our churches, to throw out some brief suggestions in relation to duty.

If a Sabbath evening service is approved and held by the church, *it ought to be sustained by its members.* Their *presence*, at least, so far as they can possibly attend, ought to contribute to this end. Such a service is more numerously attended by the impenitent than the weekday gathering; and, of course, it is more important that it be well sustained by a good representation of God's people. If unbelievers find

that the minister and deacons, with Mr. A and Mr. B, are the only male members of the church present, while a hundred or more of the impenitent are there, they will not be likely to think very highly of the religious interest and concern among the followers of Christ. What occasion, then, do our churches give unbelievers to cavil and censure! How small a proportion of Christian professors attend this service! After conversation upon this subject with several pastors, I have found that the average attendance by the followers of Christ does not much exceed the attendance upon the weekday service. It is a state of things which cannot be too quickly remedied. It is a serious question, whether the influence of such lack of interest among professing Christians, in the salvation of the impenitent, does not do more injury than the efforts of the few who sustain these meetings do good. Would that every Christian might resolve at once to bring about a more encouraging and creditable state of things! Would that the sentiment might pervade the church universal, "We must abandon the Sabbath evening worship, or else coöperate to sustain it"! Would that sympathy enough with faithful pastors existed in the church to excuse them from this service, or else spare them an unavoidable wear and tear of constitution by staying up their hands and encouraging their hearts by active coöperation! Then would the issue be better, both to pastor and people.

It should not be inferred from the foregoing that a professing Christian who absents himself from the prayer meeting is a hypocrite. Many *good* men are not always where they ought to be. Inconsideration may have somewhat to do with this, as well as moral inertia. Thomas, the doubting but excellent Christian, was absent from the first meeting for prayer and conference which the disciples held in Jerusalem, on the evening following the resurrection of Christ; and when told by the brethren that the Savior was in their midst, that they communed with him face to face, he appeared to be quite as unbelieving as are worldly-minded Christians now concerning the promise, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." His language was, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." Judging from the small portion of the church who attend the weekly prayer meeting in these times, we should infer that professors are equally incredulous now respecting the spiritual presence of Christ on such occasions; for who would not practise much self-denial to be present where the Savior vouchsafes to appear? Who would not be put to some inconvenience to enjoy a season of sacred communion with his Lord and Master? Yet many *good* men allow their unbelief, as did Thomas, to detain them from this re-

ligious service. It is a stain upon their Christian characters, although it does not prove that they are destitute of religion.

Thomas was a great loser on that occasion. What would he not have given to have set his eyes upon the Savior after he had risen from the dead! What a glorious sight to a loving disciple — the face of Him who died and rose again! Could professing Christians realize how much they lose in absenting themselves from the place of social prayer, I am sure they would not require argument or persuasion to induce them to attend. A just appreciation of the Savior's spiritual presence at such seasons of devotion would remove many excuses which now detain disciples at home.

Who can doubt the *propriety* of the prayer meeting, when Christ sanctioned, by his presence, the assembly where Thomas was not? If any such there are among the body of true believers, let them come with us into the praying circle, where love kindles, and faith wrestles at the throne of grace, and they shall learn from delightful experience that Christ is there. They will go away, no longer doubting whether Christ approves of such communings of spirit and such comminglings of desire. The elevated tone of their religious feelings and sentiments will be proof enough of the Savior's approbation.

I close this subject with two remarks to Christian professors.

THE PRAYER MEETING NEEDS YOU. The facts presented leave no room for doubt in this regard. Its prosperity and blessing to the church and world depend upon your presence and hearty coöperation. An orphan never needed a friend more than this oft-forsaken meeting needs yourselves. It asks, it invites, yea, it implores, your presence. By the good it proffers you, by the glory it yields to God, it beseeches you to COME!

YOU NEED THE PRAYER MEETING. He who asserts that he does not has reached a height of self-confidence and pride from which he will have a fearful fall. Not *need* the prayer meeting! Then you ought to be translated, Elijah-like, to a world where better beings than dwell on earth reside. Old or young, rich or poor, high or low, bond or free, barbarian, Scythian, Jew, or Greek, you need the moral influence of the praying assembly; you need it at all times, and in all places; you need it whether your circumstances are prosperous or adverse; you need it both in health and sickness; you need it whether living or dying. If old, you need it to fill with peace the latest hours of life, and plume the spirit's wings for fields of everlasting joy. If young, you need it to guide youth's wayward footsteps, and to create a love for the place of prayer which will abide with you to the end of life. Young professors of religion need to commence their Christian course

by a scrupulous regard for this social worship; for, as the beginning is, so, generally, will be the end.

We would utter it in the ear of every Christian in the land, **YOU NEED THE PRAYER MEETING, AND THE PRAYER MEETING NEEDS YOU!**

CHAPTER III.

CHURCH MEETING.

Custom of Churches. — *Object of this Meeting twofold: 1. Business; 2. Devotional Exercises.* — *Importance of.* — *Demands Interest of all.* — *Non-Attendance.* — *Some so ignorant of Church Affairs as not to know when a Brother is under Discipline.* — *Important Case of Discipline will not call some Members to Meeting.* — *Irresponsibility.* — *Sad Consequences resulting.* — *Compels a few to assume the Responsibility of doing Business.* — *Delays Action to the Reproach of Religion.* — *Church in B——.* — *Another Case.* — *Often followed by Difficulties and Strife.* — *Church in S——.* — *Another Case.* — *Supposed Cases.* — *Duty plain.* — *Remarks of Rev. Albert Barnes.*

It is the custom of our churches generally to observe a monthly meeting for the transaction of important business. Some of our larger city churches, however, observe such a meeting weekly, devoting a portion of the time to religious services. This is called the church meeting, because it is designed especially for its members.

The object of this meeting may be considered twofold: 1. To transact business. No organization can exist without more or less business to be transacted. Every well-ordered church must have much

of it to do. It is incident to its prosperity. And since the introduction of business into the weekly prayer meeting, even for a religious purpose, seems to secularize it beyond what is consistent with true devotion, it becomes highly important to sustain a meeting at which business is first to be done ; then, all other meetings may be strictly religious. 2. Devotional exercises. Frequently there is little business to claim attention at meetings appointed for this purpose. In such cases the time is employed in devotional exercises, as at the ordinary weekly service of prayer and conference. By this wise arrangement there is no interruption of the usual religious meetings, while this special gathering of the church may be made a season of Christian fellowship and communion with God when there is no business to be transacted.

The importance of such a meeting to the church may be seen from the character of the business to be transacted. It consists in granting letters of dismission and recommendation to members, the examination of candidates for admission, the adjustment of rules and regulations, action in behalf of the poor and needy in the church, the discipline of erring members, and such other business as circumstances and unforeseen emergencies demand. None of this can be omitted without inflicting a lasting injury upon the church. It concerns every member. All ought to feel a deep interest in whatever relates to

the welfare of the church to which they belong. Hence all ought to be interested in the most painful part of the business of the church meeting, even in the most unpleasant cases of discipline; for it is a truth confirmed by experience and observation, that, "whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it." If the hand, or foot, or eye becomes diseased, every part of the body deeply sympathizes with it; and, if it be not arrested, the disease often diffuses itself throughout the entire system. Thus the great apostle presents a familiar physical truth in order to teach a moral lesson concerning the prosperity of the church. Although he has particular reference to members in poverty, affliction, temptation, and persecution, yet it is a fair inference, if not a direct principle involved, corroborated by abundant facts, that, as the disease of a single member of the body causes all members to suffer with it, so may the error or sin of a single professor affect the whole church; and, if not arrested, it may diffuse itself like an insidious disease. Upon this important fact may be based an appeal to professing Christians in respect to deep interest in whatsoever pertains to the welfare of each other and their respective churches. A more weighty consideration cannot engage the attention; a more reasonable duty cannot be urged. Another has said of the professing Christian, "He is a part of that total church which the Savior came to redeem, and which is declared by him to be 'the

light of the world and the salt of the earth,' and to which he has issued the commandment 'to preach the gospel to every creature.' Whatever there is of honor, of purity, of truth, of respectability in the church, is, in part, intrusted to his hands, as to each freeman in a republic is committed a portion of the honor of his country, to each soldier in an army a portion of the honor of her flag. When he became a member of that church, by the very nature of the transaction a portion of its honor was intrusted to him; and by the same transaction he assumed a portion of its responsibility."* All, then, should coöperate to do the business which is incident to the church organization. "The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor, again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you." Neither can one member of the church declare that the influence, the effort, the coöperation of another in this branch of Christian duty is not wanted. Nor, on the other hand, can a member say that he is incompetent to participate in transacting important business for the church, nor that it does not concern himself, nor that he bears no part of the responsibility. Reason will not excuse him, conscience will not excuse him, his covenant vow will not excuse him, God will not excuse him. "If the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body?"

* Rev. Albert Barnes.

He *must* be concerned for the proper adjustment of all business relating to the prosperity of the church.

How is it, then, as to the facts in the case? Does the usual attendance upon the church meeting indicate that much importance is attached to the transaction of its business? The facts may be briefly stated. There is no meeting of the church usually attended by so few members, especially if it be known that business will consume most of the time. Christians, who love to be in the place of prayer, devotional and conscientious disciples, and especially the female portion of the church, are not there, because "*it is a business meeting.*" The obligation to meet for prayer and conference is fully acknowledged, but not the obligation to meet for the transaction of necessary business. That such is a common sentiment with Christian professors must have appeared to every careful observer. Nor is it confined entirely to the church. In every organization the same facts appear. In the school district, in the lyceum, in the anti-slavery, temperance, or missionary society, by far the smallest attendance is at the meeting *to transact business*. It sometimes demands a special effort on the part of some individual to secure the attendance of a number sufficient to form a quorum. It would not be difficult to find instances where such meetings have been repeatedly *adjourned* in order to assemble enough persons to do the business required. In the church there

is not often such gross negligence as this ; and there ought never to be even an approach to it. That a business meeting is less interesting to the active Christian than one that is strictly religious, is readily admitted. Especially is this true of the female portion of the church. It is not at all strange that to them the ordinary routine of a business meeting is dry and devoid of special interest. Still, as the prosperity of the church requires such business to be done, this alone ought to commend it to every Christian's attention, even though it be as a *duty* rather than a privilege. A female member of the church is really as much concerned for the happy issue of all questions relating to its welfare as are the males. Hence the importance of keeping themselves informed in regard to the nature and progress of the more important matters, at least, which are discussed at the church meeting.

In addition to what has been said respecting the want of interest among professing Christians concerning the transaction of church business, the following facts may be cited: In almost every church there are members, both male and female, who are so poorly acquainted with its business affairs, as scarcely to know when a brother or sister is under discipline. Many important subjects are discussed and settled at the regular meetings of which they are wholly ignorant. One of the last interrogations which they put to a fellow-disciple relates to the

business of the church. Indeed, one of the last considerations which occupies the attention regards the action which the church has taken about this, that, or the other thing. Even a case of trying discipline, in which the working members feel as if they should sink under the weight of responsibility and grief which the circumstances create, does not bring them out even to *see*, and much less to *act*. Perhaps they studiously avoid coöperation, much preferring to leave the unpleasant business to be transacted by others, as if they could elude the responsibility which their covenant relations impose. They seem to think, or at least their conduct indicates such a sentiment, that it is entirely a matter of choice, rather than of duty, whether they coöperate in administering necessary discipline or not; in other words, that no part of the responsibility rests upon themselves unless they are pleased to assume it. A sad mistake is this for one who has voluntarily taken upon himself the most solemn obligations that can be imposed upon mortal man—an unwarrantable position for him who has covenanted "*faithfully to instruct, reprove, and admonish its members when they go astray, and meekly to be instructed, reprov'd, and admonish'd by them when yourselves do err.*" *

The consequences resulting from this irresponsible feeling in respect to the business of the church, and

* The usual pledge of the covenant.

this non-attendance upon its business meetings, are such as every true Christian ought to strive to avoid. Some of them are considered below.

First, it compels a few members to *assume the responsibility* of doing the business. However true it is that every church member is responsible to God in such matters, yet only those who actually transact the business are generally considered responsible in the sight of men. They have to share alone the censure and hostility which their doings may awaken. They who stay at home in order to elude the obligation are not held amenable at the bar of public opinion. They *are* fearfully responsible to God for their *non-action*; but no account is usually made of this in the judgment of men. The active few, who feel that they are not at liberty to refuse coöperation even in cases of discipline, are alone condemned or acquitted by the decisions of the popular voice. This is no coveted post of action to occupy, especially when we consider how easily the indignation of at least a circle of men and women is excited by certain kinds of necessary church action. No professing Christian covets such a responsible place. Gladly would he be relieved from the unpleasant duty. Gladly would he be accounted the least of all the brethren, could he be excused from acting with so few. But the necessity is laid upon him by the inexcusable neglect of those who are absent. He *must* act; the cause of religion and the

honor of his divine Master demand it. Is it right for one part of a church to cast so great responsibility upon the other? If the question had regard to the support of the gospel, would it be right for one member to leave another to the necessity of paying more than his proper share while he himself pays less? No, is the response from every heart. Then is it not equally unchristian for one member to leave another to bear the responsibility of church action when he ought to coöperate with him? Are we at liberty to impose an undue share of obligation upon a brother in respect to the discipline of the church, when we are not in regard to the support of public worship? By no means. If it be unchristian to cause him to do more than his part in *money*, it is equally so to cause him to do more than his part in church action.

Want of interest in the church meeting often *delays action so as to prove detrimental to the cause of Christ*. The brethren very naturally shrink from transacting important business when only a few of their number are present. They would avoid the charge of acting hastily or assuming too great responsibility. Delay appears to them less hazardous than immediate action by a minority of the church. Therefore, business which ought to be immediately adjusted is frequently postponed from month to month, until a larger attendance can be secured. Numerous facts might be cited upon this point to

corroborate the above. We will content ourselves with the two following:—

The church in the town of B—— were about to act upon the question of taxing themselves to defray three fourths of the expense of supporting public worship. The plan was suggested in order to equalize the individual payments, and thus compel some who had been delinquent to pay their just proportion. The charge had been made by the world, and the church generally admitted its justice, that certain of its members were more deficient in this regard than some unbelievers. Several of the brethren determined many times over to introduce the subject at the next church meeting; but the paucity of the members present deterred them. Thus month after month the subject was delayed, while yet its discussion was intended at every monthly meeting. It was also generally known that the subject would come before the church, and some were heartily opposed to the adoption of such a plan, yet they did not make their appearance at the appointed meetings; and when, at length, the subject was fairly before the church, action was postponed because Mr. A and Mr. B, who had spoken to some member in opposition to the proposed plan, were not present. It was thought unwise to make a *finale* of the matter until they should secure their attendance, or at least should make an effort to this end. Months rolled away, and finally the decisive vote was cast, while yet a

number, including one or two of the opposers, were not present.

In another church, a male member was charged by the public with licentiousness, and little doubt was entertained, even by the most charitable, that the charge was not unjust, although, at present, definite evidence was wanting. His character was consequently sadly marred, and he was a reproach to religion so long as he remained in the church unrepentant, while such an accusation was not proved false. The scoffer pointed deridingly to the church as the abode of such a sinner, and charged the faithful with sympathy for the offender in his guilt, because they did not cut him off at once from their fellowship. Many a caviller dilated, in places of general resort, upon the prevalence of hypocrisy and the cheat of religion. In short, the whole ungodly community were in an uproar because such a notorious character was yet numbered with the people of God.

There was, however, as already intimated, a movement in the church. The accused had been visited according to the divine injunction, and a few were urgent to bring the unrepentant man before the church. But it was one of those cases in regard to which the best of men are likely to be cautious to a censurable degree; for he had wealth, accomplishments, and honored ancestry upon his side; therefore, to many he was less approachable than he

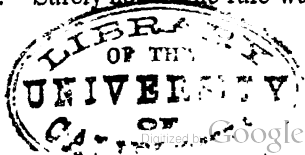
would otherwise have been. Not a few, who really desired to see him disciplined, and the reproach wiped away from the cause of Christ, were slow to act; so that, after the individual was under discipline, the many who staid away caused a long delay of necessary action. The few who assembled at the appointed meetings knew that they were dealing with a prominent individual in the community, whose character, until recently, was entitled to respect, and hence they felt the need of the coöperation of every brother in the unpleasant discipline. In this way the case was before the church for a long period, postponed from time to time in anticipation of a more general attendance. All the while a stigma rested upon the church in the eye of a witnessing world. Religion suffered and languished; Christ was wounded in the house of his friends; and all because some professing Christians were so irresponsible in respect to the business which every church is obliged to do.

The lack of attendance upon the church meeting is *sometimes followed by painful difficulties and strife*. In other organizations, the instances are numerous where important business transacted by a few, even at a regular meeting, has sent disaffection through the ranks of the absentees. There is no reason, in ordinary circumstances, for such absentees to utter complaints if the appointment of the meeting and the manner of doing the business were not irregular.

The same is true of the church. Church difficulties have had their origin here, as the following facts fully attest.

The church in S—— adopted a rule requiring every member to join the parish. It was done at a regular meeting, after the discussion of weeks in the church and private circles. There was no haste about the action, and no desire to act when any member was absent. But, although it was generally known that the subject was under discussion in the church, many, including a good share of the opposers, could not be persuaded to attend. Hence the numbers in attendance were forced to do the business themselves if it were done at all. The result was, alienation of feeling among the members, succeeded by a long season of discord and strife, while the rule enacted remained a dead letter.

Another church, at a regular business meeting, adopted an unconditional rule, requiring all the members to sign a temperance pledge. It was not passed until the subject had been repeatedly discussed, and those who were opposed to such a measure had been urged to appear at the church meeting. It was certainly reasonable that the opposers of such a rule should appear and state their objections. If they would not, could they justly complain of any action on the part of those who composed the meeting? Surely not. The rule was



finally adopted at a meeting sparsely attended, and adopted then for the very good reason that a larger attendance could not be secured. But grave charges were alleged against those who assumed the responsibility of said action, and not a little discord marred the harmony which had hitherto prevailed. Notwithstanding the above-named precautions had been taken, many insisted that the rule was adopted at a meeting when a few only were present, purposely to prevent certain persons having a part in the matter.

We may readily suppose other cases as likely to occur as the above. Two or three may be profitably noticed. A member of a church in B—— becomes a resident of the town of C——. He belongs to that class of Christian professors who are not exactly an honor, nor exactly a disgrace, to the cause of religion. Still, to a majority of the members of the church in C—— he is not unfavorably known. After the lapse of some months, in order to comply with the requisition of the church, he obtains a letter of dismission and recommendation to the church in C——, and presents himself for acceptance. In accordance with the custom which generally prevails, his letter is presented at a regular church meeting, and he is voted in. Soon one of the habitual absentees, a Christian professor, in good and regular standing, gravely informs the brethren that the new communicant ought not to have been received; that he

knows of immoralities enough to exclude him from any church ; and that, if he had *been at the meeting*, he should have made them known. All this is true ; it is not mere suspicion. The man is verily guilty, and has come into the church under a cloak of hypocrisy. And if the informant had been at the meeting, where he ought to have been, the church would have been spared the reproach which such a member brings upon it.*

Again : a church is considering the matter of revising its articles of faith, together with its rules and regulations. Upon some points all are not exactly satisfied. For instance, some would leave the question of infant baptism optional with the parents, instead of making it a condition of church membership ; or, perhaps, they would not incorporate into the creed the doctrine of election. Yet these and kindred points have been in the creed from the origin of the church, strongly stated as absolute conditions of membership. It is hence a matter of considerable importance to revise them. There is also quite an interest awakened to adopt more stringent rules than have heretofore been regarded. In this respect there

* The author has recently been informed of the case of a man who was propounded for admission to a church by letter, with others received by profession, when a godless person, hearing his name thus announced, disclosed his true character to one of the officers in season for the church to reject him. The case shows the possibility of the above.

may have been a looseness on the part of the church, as there is apt to be, and now circumstances seem to demand more rigid regulations. Business of such vital importance to a church requires great unanimity of feeling and action in order to prove a blessing. Unless the voice for change is well nigh unanimous, it is hazardous to attempt it. But if such business is to be done at an ordinary church meeting, is it possible to know the minds of even a majority of the members, unless special effort is made to consult them at their homes? It is not enough to say that the absentees do not care what revision of the creed is made or what rules are adopted. It is a poor compliment to them as professing Christians; and, besides, they *ought to care*. But suppose the revision of the articles of belief or the new regulations do essentially conflict with the views of one or more *absent* members; this would not be strange. Far more trifling transactions have given rise to dissatisfaction and subsequent strife. Might not the hard feelings and discord be spared if the aggrieved party were present at the meeting? When he knows that business of such importance is to be transacted, is it not his duty to be there, unless Providence absolutely detains him? Possibly his presence would preserve the harmony of feeling that heretofore prevailed.

There can be only one sentiment in relation to Christian duty concerning the church meeting if such consequences have resulted from neglect,

and such other consequences may possibly result. Against issues so detrimental to Zion every Christian ought to guard with untiring assiduity. He should be willing to make self-denial in respect to feeling and convenience, in order to prevent every possible collision. He should be deeply anxious, lest his absence from meetings for the adjustment of ecclesiastical affairs should be the occasion of embarrassment or rupture. Then, and only then, will he possess that spirit which will appreciate, in a tolerable degree, the importance of the meeting whose claims have now been discussed.

I quote again a paragraph from a sermon of Rev. Albert Barnes: "There are large numbers in the Christian churches who have only the feeblest conviction, if they have any, of obligation to make direct personal efforts to promote the common cause, and that the responsibility of maintaining and carrying forward religion in the world, in the more direct and self-denying and voluntary efforts, is devolved on others. A few brief illustrations here will show what I particularly wish to get before your minds. First, there is a feeling that the ministers of the gospel should be peculiarly holy and self-denying, and dead to the world, dead to its pleasures, its gains, its ambition, far more than others; and yet, will any one point me to a place in the New Testament which requires ministers of the gospel to be more devoted to the work of their Master than other

Christians, or to any precept or permission which would make that to be right in you which is wrong in us? Second, there is a prevalent feeling that the missionary to the heathen should be more deeply imbued with the spirit of the Lord Jesus, and with the principles of voluntary benevolence, than other men; that he should be more willing to take up his cross and to traverse pathless sands, or go through driving snows, to do good; that he, with almost no advantages for the cultivation of the graces of the spirit in a heathen land, a land without Sabbaths, and sanctuaries, and Christian fellowship, should be more holy than we who, in a Christian land, enjoy, in rich abundance, all the means of grace. But will any one point to the place in the New Testament which shows that there is to be one standard of holiness and self-denial for him, another for you and me? * * * How few are they in any church who feel the responsibility of laboring for the conversion of sinners as a specific thing to be done! How few are they who feel any responsibility for keeping up meetings of social prayer! How few are they, among those who are well qualified, who feel under obligation to engage in Sabbath school instruction! How few are they, and even among those who will not refuse to contribute to the object *when applied* to, who feel under personal obligation to originate any movement for the promotion of the objects of Christian benevolence, or to be the well-

known and efficient patrons of the institutions which contemplate the conversion of the world! On the minds of the few these obligations are deeply and permanently felt; on the mass, even, of professed Christians, it is feared, they are not felt; by the mass, certainly, they are not regarded." And it is this feeling of irresponsibility in regard to the transaction of church business which causes the church meeting to languish.

CHAPTER IV.

PREPARATORY LECTURE, AND LORD'S SUPPER.

The Lord's Supper a simple Ordinance. — Observed in Remembrance of Christ. — Men always sought to perpetuate Memory. — Christ had Reference to this Element of Human Nature. — His Plan differs from that of Men in Simplicity. — Founded on Law of Association. — How important and solemn this Sacrament. — Hence the Custom of observing a preparatory Season. — Communicants' Prayer Meeting. — Lecture useful. — Best Plan should be adopted. — Preparatory Lecture poorly attended. — Members do not prepare for Lord's Supper. — Abbott's Remarks. — Providence only should detain them from this Ordinance. — Should not stay away because of personal Difficulties with Members, or because there are wicked Persons in the Church. — "When they had sung a Hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives."

THE last night of our Savior's earthly sojourn had come. Defenceless and persecuted, he retired to an upper chamber with his twelve unprotected friends for the last interview before his ignominious death. The morrow would remove him from the society of his disciples and from all the scenes of his earthly mission. Hence he would do something to insure a living bond of union between his disciples and himself after the awful tragedy of the cross should

be enacted. He would have a strong Christian affinity uniting the hearts of his friends in the flesh to himself when he should be no longer visible to the bodily eye. He would leave some suitable memorial of his dying love to remind his followers, in every age, of his sacrifices for the salvation of the soul. And the ordinance which he instituted for this purpose, how simple ! how perfectly accordant with the simplicity of his character and doctrines ! how unpretending and modest ! View it as described by the sacred writer : —

“ The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread ; and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat ; this is my body, which is broken for you ; this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood ; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come.”

How simple ! The scoffer may see in the ordinance nothing but puerile and meaningless ceremony, and hence may pity the supposed superstitious disciples who come to the supper of the Lord. His eyes are not opened to behold the meaning and beauty of the unpretending rite. As to the ordinary traveller there is no language or meaning in the hieroglyphics cut upon the marble slab that is dug from

the ruins of Nineveh, while to him who has learned to interpret the strange characters they contain the truthful history of a people long since passed away, and prove the divine origin of the Scriptures, so, to him whose blind eyes have never been unsealed by the spirit and grace of God, there is no beauty or dignity in the consecrated bread and wine; while he who is made, by divine grace, to discern spiritual things, can perceive a design and adaptation in the sacred symbols, which revives his drooping graces, and increases his love for Christ.

“THIS DO IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME.” To perpetuate the memory of himself, as a suffering Savior, was the object of Christ in the institution of this ordinance. The impression of past scenes and experiences, however marked at the time, are in danger of being effaced by the cares and changes of life. Men have had regard to this fact in all ages, in the erection of monuments and the celebration of remarkable events. Our land is dotted with rising shafts to mark the spots of our fathers' great exploits. The places on which the champions of truth made their most signal achievements for the church are often rendered familiar, through befitting memorials, to children's children; and various times in the year we observe days, with the jubilant multitude, in commemoration of past events. Such customs have been handed down to us from patriarchal times. Sacred history abounds in such examples as tha

of the twelve tribes, in the reign of Joshua, setting up a monument of stones, on the banks of the Jordan, in commemoration of their deliverance from its swelling flood. Perhaps in most of such examples as we find upon the sacred record there is less of extravagant display, and more of simplicity, than characterize kindred incidents of the present day; but in each and all there is a marked design to perpetuate the remembrance of past events. There is the recognition, in all such cases, of the fact that man needs the aid of suitable memorials in order to retain the impression of by-gone scenes. Doubtless the celebration of the anniversary of our national independence has served to perpetuate the recollection of the early struggle of our fathers for liberty. Indeed, it is not too much to believe that it has kept the fire of patriotism burning in numerous hearts, and made posterity more grateful to God for the priceless boon of freedom.

Christ evidently had in view this element of human nature when he instituted the supper as a memorial of his love. He saw that, without something of the kind to interrupt the worldly schemes and musings of his people, the gospel which he preached would be likely to lose its power over human hearts. Therefore, he would gather them from time to time around the table which his goodness spreads as a REMEMBRANCER. He would fan the dying embers of Christian devotion to a flame by the memory of

his atoning sacrifice, and inspire gratitude and love by the recollection of the shedding of blood "for the remission of sins." The great duty of the communicant at the table of the Lord is to REMEMBER CHRIST—to remember him as Savior, and the brightness of his Father's glory—to remember his toils and sacrifices in establishing his kingdom on earth—to remember his agony in the garden, and his sufferings upon the cross—to remember him as Mediator and Intercessor, and now waiting in heaven to welcome his followers to an inheritance of perpetual delight. What better recollections can animate the immortal mind? What nobler, sublimer themes can command its power? What more impressive appeals can move the heart?

This plan of Christ to perpetuate his memory differs widely from the usual methods adopted by mankind to secure a similar object. In all ages, ambitious and aspiring men have sought to perpetuate their renown by leaving some proud monument behind them when they die. Unless they could found a city, or erect a mausoleum, or build a pyramid, or rear a lofty column of brass or marble, they scarcely hoped their names would live on earth. Hence Romulus founded Rome; Cephrenes built the great pyramid of Memphis; Trajan reared a lofty pillar; and Cæsar stamped his effigy upon the coin of his mighty empire. But Christ did not ask for brass or marble; he sought for no shaft or monumental pile to embalm

his name in the grateful recollections of posterity. He simply asked that his followers might meet from time to time, and receive the consecrated bread and wine in remembrance of his sufferings and death. And when the corroding touch of time shall have wasted the proudest works of art and ingenuity, and the names they were designed to perpetuate are remembered no more, this simple ordinance will still endear the risen Savior to the hearts of converted millions. It is Christ's monument, that will live as long as the world endures.

This plan of Christ to prolong the recollection of himself among his followers, by receiving the sacred symbols, is founded upon an important law of the human mind — the law of association. The association of two things in the mind so unites them that the mention of one will suggest the other. The name of Washington is associated with our independence; we cannot speak of one without thinking of the other. The slow tolling of the bell immediately suggests the death scene and funeral. When we meet a person who is notorious for swearing or profligacy, we at once think of his loathsome vice. On the other hand, when we meet an individual who is famed for his generosity or purity, our minds dwell immediately upon his virtue. So the institution of the Lord's supper, where we receive the emblems of our Savior's body and blood, is so associated in the mind with his agonies upon the cross

that we cannot come to the solemn feast without impressive thoughts of his love and stupendous sacrifice. It is impossible to participate in this Christian privilege, with even an ordinary degree of devotion, without visiting, in imagination, Gethsemane and Calvary. The ordinance, being founded upon the laws of the mind, is well suited to preserve the remembrance of Christ.

The Scriptures attach great importance and solemnity to the relations of the communicant at the table of the Lord. They present it as the most solemn and responsible place which the believer can occupy. They admit of no excuse for worldliness or thoughtlessness during this communion season. It is coming into such a nearness to untold agonies, to groans, and blood, and expiring life, that any feelings and views other than those inspired by earnest piety are sure to incur the displeasure of Almighty God. The anathema pronounced upon those who come to this supper with little or no regard to its solemn import is exceedingly fearful. Language could not be uttered more expressive of divine displeasure to deter the professing Christian from coming recklessly to Christ's table. Hear the great apostle as he treats of this subject to the Corinthian church: "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Whosoever shall eat this bread

and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." One would suppose that such a fearful warning would be enough to insure self-examination on the part of every Christian before receiving the sacred symbols. To come to the table with plans of worldly business, or cherishing some darling sin, to appear there with unkindness or malice towards a fellow-traveller to eternity, or with pride, jealousy, envy, and kindred evil passions rankling in the heart, is to brave the above terrific threatening of Jehovah. What Christian disciple dare take upon himself the awful responsibility of receiving the bread and wine with stupid indifference or an unfeeling heart? Who would run the hazard of exciting divine indignation by the demeanor of a careless communicant? Who would not be solicitous lest he eat and drink "*damnation to himself*"?

Upon the importance and solemnity attached to this ordinance is based the custom of the church to observe devotional seasons preparatory to it. If receiving the emblems imposes so great responsibilities upon the communicant, then, certainly, a suitable preparation is the dictate of reason and conscience. "Let a man examine himself, and so let

•

him eat that bread, and drink that cup." Hence it has long been the custom with pastors to preach a lecture to church members preparatory to the Lord's supper. Some churches, however, dispense with the set lecture, or sermon, and sustain a "communion's prayer meeting." Others observe a service in which all the members of the church, male and female, are expected to participate, by speaking of their experience with reference to the approaching sacrament.

That the usual preparatory lecture is more useful than the other services named above to prepare the church member for the communion season, some will question; and all, doubtless, will admit that it may sometimes give place to the meeting for conference and prayer with great advantage, and, perhaps, in some latitudes, be set aside entirely for the substitution of the latter. The labor of preparing the lecture amid duties which already tax the pastor beyond his strength, and the paucity of the number who listen to it, may be urged as objections to this service. Would that the latter objection did not apply with such force as it really does! for, if the attendance upon the lecture were more general, its usefulness and consequent importance would be better appreciated. Besides, it would furnish an excellent opportunity for the preaching of those plain and pungent sermons which every faithful minister must preach. It would be far more congenial to a

pastor's feelings to expose the delinquencies of God's people on this occasion than upon the more public ministrations of the Sabbath. Still, the importance of the lecture, so extensively observed, at least by Congregational churches, ought not to be overlooked. Though it fail, in any degree, to secure the object designed, — preparation for the Lord's supper, — that failure is not *necessary*. Fidelity to covenant vows, on the part of Christian professors, may render it an invaluable means of grace.

The most successful way of securing the necessary degree of spirituality with which to appear at the table of the Lord ought certainly to be adopted; nor should the communicant depend entirely upon the more public service for the requisite preparation. In secret places he should commune with his own heart and with God before he comes to enjoy the closer communion of the holy eucharist. It is, after all, in retirement that the heart is purged from sin, and the Christian is fitted to receive, with becoming humility and faith, the memorials of our Savior's love. The neglect of private devotion will chill the affections, even though there is a constant attendance upon the meetings for prayer and conference. Hence, whatever be the character or frequency of public religious services, self-examination and secret prayer are indispensable as a preparation for the supper of the Lord.

Yet, whatever preparatory service is nominally

sustained by the church, whether it be a lecture or prayer meeting, it ought to be generously attended by the members. If only a few are present, the service is lost to the church as a whole. At present, there is almost universal negligence in our churches in respect to the preparatory lecture. In churches of ordinary size, only from *one fourth* to *one half* of the members attend at any one time upon this service. In the larger churches, the proportional number is still less. An officer of one of the largest churches in the state informed me that the average attendance at the preparatory lecture was only *one eighth* of their number. This may be an exception, and we hope for the honor of Christ that it is; but that Christian professors are delinquent in this regard is too evident to admit of dispute. A minority only of almost every church avail themselves of this means of grace. The majority, and often a large majority, absent themselves without any conscientious scruples.

In regard to a special preparation for the Lord's supper, how few of us can be exempted from a solemn charge before God! How many press their worldly pursuits until late on Saturday night, and rise on Sabbath morning, with jaded mind and sluggish soul, to go to the communion table of Christ! Would that no professor ever received the bread and cup with as little concern and devotion as he receives his daily food! Would that no one ever presumed

to sit at the Lord's table in a frame of mind as careless as that with which he attends upon an ordinary religious service! But, alas! the truth cannot be disguised, that, without a moment spent in prayer or self-examination, many professing Christians come to the Lord's table. With no anxious inquiry into the spiritual state of the heart, whether one is fitted to receive the emblems worthily or not, some presume to sit as communicants. The thought that it is the time for the soul to have a moral reckoning with God, to settle accounts, and make provision for the future, does not seem to pervade the mind. All that has been said respecting the importance and solemnity of the sacrament of the Lord's supper is a withering rebuke to such a course.

For this reason it may be that Zion languishes; for this reason, possibly, it is that vital piety is at so low an ebb. The apostle declared to the church at Corinth that there were many "weak and sickly" Christians among them because *they improperly celebrated the Lord's supper*. He ascribed their lack of spiritual prosperity to this delinquency alone. So, now, may not an improper observance of this sacrament excite the displeasure of God, and bring a moral blight upon the church?

Abbott has so pungently exposed the delinquencies of some Christian disciples, in relation to preparatory lecture and the Lord's supper, that I quote his language entire: "It is preparatory lecture to-

night,' says one of the weak, sickly Christians pointed at by Paul in the passage above quoted 'Let me see — shall I go?'

"He has been all day engaged in the world, and his heart is still full of its interests and cares. On the other hand, there is the *habit* of going to the preparatory lecture. After a contest of a few minutes between the two, the habit, or, as it, perhaps, should be called, the attachment to form, conquers, though he fancies that the victory is gained by Christian principle. He walks along at the appointed time, either thinking of his worldly plans, or else indulging a feeling of self-complacency at his superior interest in religious duty when he sees how few of his brethren are to be there.

"He listens to the discourse much as he would to any other sermon, and applies the general considerations it presents, with the same fidelity, to his own case, that this class of Christians usually exemplify. On his way home he may make a remark or two about the discourse or the smallness of the number present; and then the world, even if it was actually excluded while he was in the house of God, which is more than doubtful, presses in upon him again. The approaching solemnity passes from his mind, until, on the next Sabbath, when he is walking up the aisle to the pew, his eye catches the plate arranged for the ordinance, and he says to himself, 'O it is communion to-day.'

•

“ During the administration of the ordinance, he endeavors to listen to the pastor's remarks ; but he finds it somewhat difficult to attend to them. Some few very vague and general religious impressions pass through his mind ; and when the cup is handed to him he looks serious, and takes his portion with a very reverential air, and something like a general supplication for forgiveness and for greater measures for holiness pass through his mind. There is something like a slight feeling of impatience at the delay while the elements are distributing to the others ; and yet it is not impatience exactly ; but he has nothing to do with his thoughts, and he feels a little satisfaction when the ceremony is over. He will not acknowledge it, even to himself ; but it is in his heart, and he walks home feeling that he has been discharging a duty, which, though it is not an unpleasant one certainly, he still is glad that it is done.

“ It is a dead letter — a lifeless, heartless, useless form ; and thousands of Christians every where thus pervert the ordinance which God designed to be, perhaps, one of the most efficacious means of grace that the Christian is permitted to enjoy.”

What has been said plainly teaches the duty of constantly participating in the privilege of the Lord's supper. Ordinary reasons for staying away from the house of God should not detain one from the communion ; for all need to be put in remembrance of

Christ. All need the restraints and impulses, the admonitions and grace, incident to the proper observance of this sacrament. No slight excuse is received by Him who instituted this ordinance as a necessary memorial of his sufferings and death. Upon this point every Christian should feel conscience-bound. Effort, self-denial, and planning, beyond the usual degree, should bring them to the "feast of charity."

But what if a professor does not feel prepared to receive the emblems; shall he stay away? Shall he refuse to celebrate the sacrament with his brethren? Such questions are really forestalled by considering a prior obligation, to which they make no reference. Duty lies back of this low, languishing state of religion. Unprepared to come to the table of the Lord! Is it not a Christian's duty to be prepared for this ordinance? Where falls the blame if he is not in a proper frame of mind to be a communicant? The question, then, is not, whether he should stay away because he is not spiritual enough; but rather, ought he not to possess such a degree of holiness as to render him an acceptable communicant? This question, answered in the affirmative, leaves no opportunity to put the other.

Another point deserves to be noticed. Sometimes professing Christians refuse to come to the Lord's table because of personal difficulties with some member who is still in full communion, or because

of known sins on the part of the officers or other members of the church. Is this right? By what authority do such persons refuse to attend upon this ordinance? Do they find a sanction for such a course in the Scriptures? The command of Christ is, "This do in remembrance of me," and that, too, without the proviso, if there are no Judases in the church. What though an Achan or a Judas is at our side? We are not responsible for their sins. We are responsible for the manner in which we celebrate the supper, and so is the delinquent. True, we are our "brother's keeper;" but only in respect to the example we set, and the influence of word or deed which we exert over him; and this, so far from excusing our attendance upon this ordinance because of another's delinquencies, increases our obligation to celebrate it in a manner that shall be safe for him to follow. We always meet most successfully the obligations in regard to being a "brother's keeper" by discharging the obligations we owe to our own hearts. When our own hearts are pure in the sight of God, we are not chargeable with failures in this respect. And, if this be true, the sins of a fellow church member, however gross, cannot modify or change our duty to remember Christ at his table. The pastor himself, who breaks the bread, may be a delinquent; and the deacons, who distribute it, may be equally censurable; still the command is upon the communicant, "This do in

remembrance of me." It is not for him to ask at the Lord's table whether a brother or sister is good enough to be there. He is to "*examine himself*," not others, on this interesting occasion. At another time and place it is his duty to discipline, and cut off, if necessary, all wicked members. Christ sat at the table with Judas, although he knew him to be a "devil."

"And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives." It was a quiet and lovely retreat, congenial to the pious feelings awakened at the last supper. The solitude of the olive groves was a fit place for meditation and retrospective views. In the streets of the city a holy, subduing thought might be put to flight as a timid dove; but in the silent mount, where the Savior was wont to retire for holy musing and prayer, there was nought to interrupt the flow of religious emotion begotten at the sacramental board. The disciples acted wisely in seeking such a place after the communion enjoyed in the upper room. Thus should the communicant conduct now as he goes away from the Lord's table. Instead of seeking the society of the worldly, and allowing himself to converse upon topics of a secular nature, he should strive to foster the good resolves and pious emotions inspired by the communion service. Then will the blessing of God abide upon him.

CHAPTER V.

CHURCH AND PARISH.

Collision between them. — Object of Parish Organization frequently defeated. — Debts contracted and Expenses unpaid. — Sanctuaries mortgaged. — Some obliged to pay more than their proportional Part. — Ministers' Salaries unpaid. — Credit of Parish impaired. — Hence Parish and Church dilatory. — Irresponsible. — Duty of Believers and Unbelievers to support Gospel. — Parish is the Organization of Necessity. — Every Church Member ought to pay his proportional Part. — Should also belong to the Parish. — Address to Young Men. — Conclusion.

THE relation of the CHURCH and PARISH has become a subject of great importance. So much discussion and strife are occasioned by their connection, and such embarrassments are cast upon the cause of truth in consequence, that it is high time their mutual relations were better understood. The parish was designed to facilitate the support of the gospel, and thus promote the object of the church organization. Like the two parts of a whole, they ought to harmonize, and present a beautiful example of mutual coöperation; but, instead of this, the church is too often a foe to the parish, and the parish to the

church. One charges the other with neglect of duty, and often one refuses to do what is supposed to be the work of the other. In consequence of this, there is frequently delay, inefficiency, and even deliberate refusal to meet obligations.

Evidently something is wrong in the present relations of church and parish, as too generally their conflicts indicate. When there is much friction in any part of a system of racing machinery it indicates a wrong adjustment, and demands immediate attention, in order to prevent waste and avert disaster; and when there is friction between the parts of a religious organization it shows there is wrong somewhere, which essentially retards its progress, and wastes the organism itself, unless speedily removed.

That such is the truth in regard to the lack of co-operation between the church and parish, the following reference to what is frequently witnessed will fully establish.

The object of the PARISH ORGANIZATION is frequently defeated. It is intended to be the agency for transacting the secular business of the church, or rather the organization for the collection and disbursement of its finances. It is taken for granted in its formation that *all* Christian professors will approve the object, and yield it their support; and since it originated in the fact that many non-professors are willing to coöperate in sustaining religious ordinances, whose support God has devolved, in a

special sense, upon the church, it is expected that many unconverted citizens will be found among its members. As one of its designs was, originally, to combine as large a portion of the community as possible in support of the gospel, thus dividing the necessary expenditure among a considerable number instead of imposing it upon a few, its early constitution had reference to the mass of citizens.

This object is not accomplished. A small portion of any religious society belong to the parish. Even many members of the church, men of prayer and undoubted piety, are not scrupulous at all in refusing to unite with others in this capacity. Hence it often happens that only a part of the church are members of the parish, and a still smaller number of non-professors. In these circumstances it is not possible to accomplish the original design of the parish in equalizing, in any measure, the necessary expenses. For the parish to support the gospel wholly, in all places, would be the work of a very small minority of our communities, and would not embrace many of God's people. Men are in the habit of declaring, "I will pay so much, and no more;" "I will not submit to be taxed." Even Christian professors say this; and now, such is the state of things in many religious societies, that an attempt to equalize individual apportionments would shiver the parish into fragments. There would be "signing off," and such general scat-

tering as the past, in similar circumstances, has frequently witnessed.

Debts are contracted by religious societies. How few of them can show no deficiency in this respect ! how few cancel the expenses of each year promptly as they arise ! And is it always an absolute lack of means which prevents ? Are not religious societies now burdened with debts, when a very small assessment upon the property within their limits would liquidate them ten times over ? In numerous instances, might not the debts be removed at once if there were no collision between the church and parish, or if the object of their union, in relation to the mass of citizens, were accomplished ? Is it not true that, in numerous instances where debts rest as an incubus upon religious societies, there you hear that " Mr. A or Mr. B does not pay his real proportion," and that it " would be comparatively easy to support the gospel if all would do their duty " ? This suggests where to find, frequently, one cause of parish debts.

Sanctuaries are mortgaged. This has become quite a common occurrence, so common that we cease to regard it with that degree of repugnance which the true character of the thing demands. The circumstances which render it proper to mortgage the property which we have solemnly consecrated to the Lord do not often arise. There is an incongruity in

dedicating a house of worship to God, and then making it over, by legal instruments, to earthly creditors. Where there is sufficient property in a society to prevent such kind of dealing with the Lord's property, even by the largest assessment consistent with Christian principles, the sanctuary ought not to be mortgaged.

Some are compelled to pay more than their proportional part of the necessary expenses. A few individuals in many societies always have to make up the deficiency in cancelling the yearly expenditures; and they are usually that number, also, who have most liberally subscribed for the same object. Hence it is quite usual for a small number of parishioners to do much more than others in proportion to their means, and sometimes, perhaps, more than Christian duty strictly requires.

Ministers' salaries are unpaid. A long and tingling story of neglect, and even injustice, might be told in this regard. It would make a volume of marvellous interest, perhaps as wonderful as fiction, this tale of salaries unpaid. It would disclose many necessary wants in the family unsupplied, worn and patched wardrobes, and empty bookcases, because the ministers' just dues are withholden. It would contain many touching scenes of anxiety and despondency, and many original plans of economy, seemingly penurious to the world. It would reveal many secret resolves to seek another field of labor, unfulfilled

solely through fear of opposing the will of the Lord. It would embrace many "pastoral sketches" like the following: The minister, toiling away with his pen long after his parishioners are lost in their nightly slumbers, to produce an article for some weekly publication, for which he receives a small compensation; going to the store for groceries without a cent in his pocket, thus compelled to ask the merchant to violate his rule of "cash" or "no trust" in opening an account for a few days only, until another "mite" comes drizzling into his pocket from the collector's hand; riding out of town to a friend to obtain the means to pay a note at the bank which he was compelled to get discounted only because his salary was unpaid, and for the payment of which he would have ample means could he command his hire; meeting a kind creditor to whom he has promised payment; obliged to confess his inability to fulfil the promise because his parish have not fulfilled theirs; mourning over a report that he disregards his pecuniary engagements, when his failure in this respect was owing entirely to the non-payment of his salary.

Religious societies are not aware of the trials occasioned by such pecuniary failures. The salaries of ministers are too generally the very smallest allowance required to satisfy daily wants.* They need every cent promptly in order to meet their en-

* See Appendix, C.

gements ; and, having no other resources, a failure of payment by the parish is more sensibly felt.

There are those who regard what they pay a minister as a gift, instead of wages for his labor. The very term which they employ to denote their act is expressive of this ; for it is *giving*, and not *paying*, as if it were a matter of decided benevolence. Hence they suppose that considerable credit is due to themselves, and that the minister is under special obligations in consequence of these favors. No sentiments can be more dishonorable to a people, and none more injurious to the gospel ministry. Does the farmer look upon the wages of a day laborer as a *gratuity* ? Does the manufacturer consider that the weekly or monthly dues of employees are in any sense a *gift* ? Does the merchant suppose that he is simply conferring a favor upon his clerk by paying him the amount previously stipulated ? Then why should a person regard his parish contribution as a sort of *present* to the pastor ? Does he labor fewer hours in the day than the farmer or mechanic ? Have none of his parishioners seen a light in his study after most of his people are asleep at night, and before many of them are awake in the morning ? Is it possible for a minister to introduce the "ten hour" system of toil into his pastoral sphere ? And does it materially alter the case whether the labor is intellectual or manual ? We submit these interrogations to the consideration of those who regard the

minister's salary a sort of *gratuity*, and especially to those who feel little responsibility in the matter, while yet they are as dependent upon him in seasons of sorrow as are those who pay the largest tax.

Another unhappy thing in this connection is, the *impaired credit of religious societies in which such scenes as the foregoing transpire*. To allow such failures and disregard of engagements to occur is so much like the loosest policy of worldly business as to diminish the importance and sacredness of supporting the gospel. Hence it is liable to be construed into irresponsibility by those who are impatient for their dues. In such circumstances, the society's credit wanes in a manner that seems to promise a lasting stigma.

It follows, from such a state of affairs as has been described, that the church and parish, in their united capacity, are too often *dilatory*. This is frequently true of corporations and other organized bodies; but it ought not to be true of the most sacred institution on earth. The church ought to be a complete model in this regard to the world. It may seem to be a small matter, yet it is sufficiently important to contribute largely towards making her "as a city set on a hill."

It follows, also, that the church and parish are too often *irresponsible*. They may be composed of men who are scrupulously exact in all their personal affairs, men of stainless purity and strict integrity, yet,

associated with others where the responsibility is subjected to considerable divisibility, the obligation is less regarded. One waits for another. What is the business of all is the business of none. In their collective capacity they lose sight of what would be accounted acknowledged duty in their individual relations.

Here is a subject of more importance than even Christian men are wont to suppose. A little reflection will satisfy all that the promise of a church and parish ought to be as sacredly regarded as that of a private individual. If men may be excused in violating an agreement in their collective relations, then may they be excused in doing the same in their personal affairs. In the church we discipline the members who fail to regard deliberate promises, and do it justly and scripturally. It would be for the honor and prosperity of Zion if churches were more faithful still in disciplining their members for the loose method of doing business so common at this day. But is it consistent in a church to discipline a member for a violation of a promise, while *all her members*, in their collective capacity, have violated a plain promise to the pastor, or others in their employment? Might not the brother under discipline with much propriety hurl the rebuke, "Cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye"? The truth is not yet learned that the prom-

ise of a body of believers is just as binding and sacred as that of *one* believer; for the obligation of the whole is the *aggregated* obligations of each. The anathemas of an incensed public never having been hurled against the church and parish for this sin as they have against the reckless trader, it is regarded far less heinous. But in the sight of God, before whose tribunal this subject will be reviewed, a promise is a promise, whether made by an individual or by the church and parish.

The foregoing remarks prepare the way to understand where rests the obligation to support the gospel. The gospel is a *common* blessing. Directly or indirectly, every person in a Christian community is benefited by it. Even the impious scoffer, who rejects it as a gross delusion and imposition, is sharing in its blessings through the improved social state of which it is the author. His life and property are better protected; his domestic and social relations are more peaceful; he is himself more humane and happier for its diffusion. Now, because it is a *common* blessing, the obligation to support it becomes *common*; just as it is with the boon of education, for the support of which every man in our midst, saint or sinner, is taxed, whether he has children to send to school or not. Society is greatly improved by its general diffusion, and he enjoys this benefit in common with others, and hence he is under obligation to aid in sustaining schools; just as it is

with the support of highways, for which he is taxed, whether he travels upon them or not. They are a public advantage, an important step in the march of civilization, in whose blessings he participates, and therefore he is obligated to pay his proportional part of the expense of supporting them. This being true, it follows that the unbeliever cannot refuse coöperation in sustaining the gospel with any more propriety than he can refuse to pay a tax for education or any other public good. He is under obligation to do his part in supporting Christianity *in some form*.

But that a special obligation is devolved upon church members, in consequence of their covenant relations, to support the ordinances of religion, must be admitted; for they have voluntarily entered the church, knowing that God instituted it as *the* agency to preserve, spread, and perpetuate the gospel, and hence aware that they must bear their part of the burden. Indeed, they solemnly *covenant* to support the gospel. The unbelieving world may refuse their coöperation, and for this Christianity shall not cease to advance; but her willing advocates and defenders must roll on her car of light. While, then, this common obligation to support the gospel rests upon both believers and unbelievers, as members of society which it blesses, the believer is still to remember the additional responsibilities of his covenant relations.

Scripture authority for the parish is not claimed.

It is simply the *organization of necessity*. In every Christian community there are more or less enlightened, virtuous citizens, not numbered with the people of God, who recognize the obligation of doing their part in supporting the institutions of religion. Hence, as organization is necessary to combine this strength and facilitate the proposed business, the parish originated in the good design of associating such individuals with professing Christians in supporting religious ordinances. Circumstances seemed to demand such an organism ; and, since it were impossible to combine this needed and proffered aid without it, the parish may properly be called *the organization of necessity*.*

There can be no valid objections presented to the formation of a parish, even with no higher authority than the above. There is no scriptural prohibition relating thereto ; and, since it is not forbidden, like many other excellent institutions, it can easily be defended on the ground that circumstances demand it. The only direct plea we can urge for the observance of many social and religious rites and duties is that of *necessity* ; and certainly, if the good to be accomplished by any institution may be urged as a reason for its existence, then the parish may be defended on this ground.

Enough has been already hinted to show that

* See Appendix, D.

every professing Christian ought to be willing to bear his proportional part of the expense of supporting the gospel. This would be to render pecuniary assistance according to the divine rule, "*as God hath prospered him.*" Surely no plan could be devised in which the law of Christian equity is more strictly regarded. It commends itself to the conscience of every enlightened believer as just and Christian. If he evades it, he can but feel conscious of a moral degradation which is ever consequent upon acting contrary to the plain convictions of right and duty. How this proportional share of each member shall be determined is no part of my object to say. It may, however, be stated, briefly, that "some of the fathers of the New England churches maintained that the pastor's salary should be raised by voluntary contributions, '*laid by,*' if not *contributed,* 'on the first day of the week,' agreeably to 1 Cor. xvi. 20: 'Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him,' &c. The famous John Cotton insisted that this was the only proper way to raise a minister's salary." * Formerly the custom was universal in New England to raise the salary of ministers by levying a tax upon all the inhabitants of a parish. That what is called the "*voluntary system*" is more like the plan of the

* Punchard's Congregationalism, p. 183, note.

primitive church, as learned from the New Testament, cannot be denied.*

A willingness to pay their proportional part is alone consistent with the profession which believers have made. Any sentiment or feeling to the contrary is a virtual or actual evasion of the question, How much does God require? The real position of a Christian who refuses to regard the principle under consideration may be understood by an allusion to what has often occurred. Here is an *unbeliever* possessing a deep interest in the support of the gospel. He volunteers his aid, and is willing to submit to an assessment upon his property to raise the amount required for parish purposes. He joins the parish, and gives his heart and hand to prosper its affairs. He advocates the doctrine that every citizen sharing the blessings of our common Christianity ought to pay his proportional part of the expense of maintaining its ordinances. On the other hand, a professing Christian, belonging to the same society, declares that he will pay so much, and no more, (a sum usually much smaller than his just assessment would be.) He refuses to unite with the parish, lest his property should be taxed, and his quarterly payments be thereby increased. He exhibits little interest in seasons of pressure, when extra efforts are

* See Appendix, E.

making to remove arrearages. He cares but little how much the brethren are obliged to pay, and is not particularly annoyed if the expenses are not wholly cancelled. In short, his actions contradict the Christian sentiment, that *each member of the church ought to pay his proportional part of the expenses.*

We have thus briefly sketched two characters which are often found in our communities — one out of the church, the other a member of it; and now we ask if the course of the worldly man is not more tenable and consistent with the precepts and doctrines of revealed truth than is that of the Christian professor? Were a stranger to be made acquainted with the course of both, would he not infer that the man who was willing to do to the extent of his ability in supporting public worship was the Christian? Let the follower of Christ gaze upon these two portraits, and say if he is willing to mar his sacred profession by such a course. Let him see himself placed in contrast with such a willing giver of the world, and then decide whether he is ready to bear the reproach which an observant public will surely heap upon such a character. And, above all, let his thoughts wander beyond these earthly shores, and let him ask himself whether he is willing to stand in contrast with such a giving unbeliever at the bar of God.

Of course, as has been already said, indirectly, all the members of the church ought to belong to the

parish. This appears to be necessary in order to apply the principle above discussed relative to paying proportionally, as God hath prospered them.* It is necessary for other reasons obvious to the reader. Let a believer refuse to join the parish. If all, in the church and out of it, follow his example, how can the parish exist? And surely, if a professing Christian can refuse to do this, may not a man of the world innocently decline? The church member is not at liberty to set such an example, in this particular, or any other, as would jeopardize the interests of the society.

Persons ought to join the parish *to work*. They should not be mere nominal members. The most disagreeable part of a parishioner's duty is not performed always when he has settled with the collector. There is frequently an "out-door" work to be done; and too often one or two persons must do it, if it be done at all. Each member ought to possess such an interest in the welfare of the parish as to be willing to labor for it in all ways consistent with other and superior duties. One of the most common reasons of inefficiency in religious societies is this too general unwillingness to do a certain necessary, thankless work outside the sanctuary. It is a work which must be done, or debts and other embarrassments will multiply; but few there are to do it.

* See Appendix, F.

This supposes a constant attendance upon parish meetings. It is a fact, which has greatly embarrassed the interests of religious societies, that very few persons who belong to this organization are ever seen in attendance upon its meetings. There are usually about such a number whose presence can be depended upon on such business occasions. The remainder are seldom present, unless it is on some occasion to vote against a *tax*. This is a great hinderance to the prosperity of a parish, and is wholly inexcusable. There ought to be more interest, more enterprise, more efficiency than this. "A living dog is better than a dead lion."

In this connection, a thought may be profitably expanded concerning the relation of young men, particularly Christian young men, to the parish. Ordinarily, few of this class belong to the parish. Custom and public sentiment may be at fault here. It has not generally been expected that unmarried young men would connect themselves with the parish. Its business has rather been conducted with the view that the parish is chiefly designed for men who have families to seat in the house of God. Hence young men have come to feel that they are not wanted in this relation, or else are led to bestow little or no attention upon the subject. Doubtless there are multitudes of this class who have never connected themselves with a religious society by joining the parish, simply because *they have never*

thought of it. It is believed that no class of persons would more cheerfully combine their strength in this capacity, were the proper measures adopted to hasten this desirable result, than the young men of our towns and villages. And the object commends itself more forcibly to our regard because of the happy influence it would have upon the characters of young men themselves. To deepen their interest in the welfare of a particular religious society, to cluster their sympathies and honorable desires around it, as a union with the parish would tend to do, must prove a great blessing to any young man. He becomes thereby more emphatically a "part and parcel" of the community in which he resides. He is likely to become a more important and useful citizen in riper years. He will be more disposed to cultivate the manly and staple virtues which society needs. All this supposes such a connection with the parish as leads to the same independent, manly action that distinguishes men of maturer years, and not a mere nominal connection. Upon all *Christian* young men the same obligations rest as we have seen to abide upon Christian professors in middle or advanced life.

It is only by a scrupulous regard to the principles and duties discussed that the relation of the church and parish will prove a blessing to Zion. These, faithfully observed, will create an efficiency and harmony of action such as will honor the Christian religion, and cause the ordinances of the gospel to

flourish. What beauty and power in the united movements of these two organisms, working without collision or friction — each member studying to bear his part of the burden according to the Christian rule — all desirous to understand their individual duties, with hearts eager to discharge them — no one eluding personal responsibility, nor measuring his own obligations by a brother's delinquencies — a place for each recognized, and each one in his place! How sweetly would this accord with the peaceful spirit of Christianity! what honor it would reflect upon religious denominations! what an impetus it would give to the tardy wheels of moral revolution! what glory would redound to God! The good of earth and heaven would pour their benedictions upon the union of church and parish.

CHAPTER VI.

SABBATH SCHOOL.

What has it done? — What will it do? — These Questions answered. — Important Agency in the Salvation of the World. — Hence the Relation of the Church to the Sabbath School. — General Complaints about Lack of Interest in. — Duties of professing Christians relating to. — They themselves should be Members. — They should see that their Children are Members. — Should be willing to become Teachers. — Should pray for it. — Not allow it to supersede religious Instruction at Home.

THE SABBATH SCHOOL—what *has* it done? What *will* it do? These are important questions to be answered, and the answer will reflect light upon the duty of the church.

The Sabbath school *has done what?* It has commended the Bible to thousands as a precious record of truth. It has inspired respect and reverence for the gospel of Christ in a multitude of hearts otherwise reckless of eternal realities and hostile to God. It has begotten a taste for sacred things, and decided the choice of many a child and youth in favor of morality and religion. It has cast up imposing barriers in the path of the early wanderer, whose steps

(112)

were leading him down to death. It has thrown effectual restraints around the heart of the roving and restless lad, whose young imagination has painted illusive scenes of delight beyond the supervision of parents and the checks of the family circle. It has engendered a sincere regard for the Sabbath as a day to be consecrated to the Lord. It has raised up devoted and efficient officers for the church. It has furnished faithful pastors and teachers to the people of God in almost every land. It has prepared self-denying missionaries of the cross to go through regions of darkness, scattering light and life. It has been the pioneer of the church in planting the gospel's banner in the valleys of the west and on the mountain tops of the east. Around it, as a nucleus, have gathered the meek and broken hearted, from whose toils and prayers of faith have sprung the ordinances of religion, well sustained, and eminently useful. Some of the strongest churches of the west, and some of the most active churches of New England, too, had their origin in the institution of the Sabbath school. And now, in all our churches, it is looked upon as the hopeful field of Zion; for it furnishes, from time to time, the largest part of her members and some of the brightest ornaments of the Christian world. Probably four fifths of all the lay followers of Christ now active in his vineyard, and as large a proportion of all the ministers and missionaries in this and other lands, were

greatly enlightened and impressed, if not actually converted, in the Sabbath school. This institution, with the blessing of God, has thus furnished some of the most powerful agencies, in the form of gifted minds and holy hearts, for the salvation of this ruined world; and it has sown seed in the mellow soil of the youthful heart, from which the Christian laborer is now reaping a golden harvest.

Where now is the church which does not depend upon it to fill its fast-thinning ranks? Is it not called the "nursery of the church"? What community would expect to prosper without this agency? Blot out this institution, with its blessed influences, from our Christian communities, and how much would be lost! how greatly the prosperity of Zion would be diminished! Every social and moral interest would be affected for the worse.

Nor has it blessed the church alone. It has done more for the STATE than interested politicians and statesmen are willing to admit; for every evil passion it has hushed, every vicious habit it has corrected, every turbulent spirit it has subdued, every moral wanderer it has checked, every hopeful aim it has inspired, every pure resolve it has created, and every moral and religious life it has established, has been diminishing the forces of evil that war with national prosperity, and increasing the power of government against the workers of iniquity. The Sabbath school, wherever established, east, west, north,

or south, is a restraint upon vice and crime. Fewer lawless men frequent the streets, fewer brawls and carousals disturb the community, and less confusion and disorder prevail.

Have not the lovers and defenders of the Bible, in all ages, been the defenders of liberty? Have they not been the untiring advocates of free institutions? Have they not been the zealous friends of education? Who is more earnest for the instruction of the young, the gratuitous intellectual culture of the poor, and the general support of schools and seminaries of learning, than the lover of the Bible? Who more than he engages with a large heart in works of philanthropy and benevolence? And who is more likely to become a lover and defender of the Scriptures, that youth who absents himself from the Sabbath school, or the one who is enlightened and disciplined by its religious instructions?

Who makes the best governor or president? Who is the more sincere and faithful statesman? Who is the more conscientious judge? Who is the more trusty juror? Who is the more honorable and useful lawyer? Is the man who has little or no respect for the Bible trustworthy in all or any of these relations? Nay; but rather the man who from his youth has revered and studied the sacred Scriptures. Hence this weekly study of the word of God becomes a blessing to the state, by familiarizing the tender minds of children and youth with its essential doctrines.

Enough has been said to show what the Sabbath school has done. All this, and more, has been accomplished within comparatively a few years. This method of Christian training is a modern improvement, and its fruits are the result of a brief experiment. The institution is yet in its infancy, so that the full might of its moral strength is yet unknown; but its achievements in the past is the harbinger of what is to come. If it has been an agency so powerful even in its infancy, what *must* it be when time shall fully develop its moral force?

What *will* the SABBATH SCHOOL do? This is our next inquiry. It will do more than it has done in past days. It is just established in the confidence of Christian people, and better prepared now than ever for exerting a powerful influence in the salvation of the race. It will continue to sow the precious seed of life. It will create a healthy moral sentiment in the villages of the far west, which are springing up, as by the power of magic, on the banks of every stream and in every valley. It will raise up thousands of devoted Christians to become the able conservators of the church and state. It will multiply lay teachers, who will heed the calls of the needy in the western valley and on the Pacific coast. It will multiply preachers of the gospel of the self-sacrificing and faithful sort. It will raise up scores of dauntless missionaries to penetrate the darkest wilds, to climb the loftiest mountains, to cross the

stormiest seas, to dare the thickest perils, to visit the most besotted people, as the heralds of the cross and the defenders of the gospel of peace. Thus, from isle to isle, from sea to sea, from shore to shore, from the rising to the setting sun, this agency of moral power will roll a wave of gracious influence, whose increasing aggregate of power will not be known until the judgment day. And more — with no greater success than has attended this institution in past time, its future triumphs will add thousands to the company of the redeemed in glory.

Here, then, is an important instrumentality to be employed in the great work which is imposed upon the church — THE SALVATION OF THE WORLD. And the fact starts the inquiry, *What is the relation of the church to the Sabbath school?* In what light is it to be regarded by Christian professors? What can they do to sustain it? How shall they counsel and command their children in reference to it? Are there any specific acts which they can perform, any measures which they can adopt, to render it prosperous? Does not the fact of its extensive usefulness, the place it occupies as a Christianizing agency, create the obligation to tax themselves to the last iota of ability in sustaining it? Can a follower of Christ, pledged by the terms of the everlasting covenant to toil for the spread of truth, — can he regard with indifference an institution so useful as this, and

withhold from it his personal support, without incurring guilt?

Questions of similar import to the above press one upon the other as we revolve this important theme. They are questions evidently but little pondered; for, on every hand, in almost every town and village where a church exists, we hear the complaint that there is lack of interest in this "nursery of the church." We are told that some Christians do not attend when they might with little inconvenience; that they refuse to fill the office of teachers; that their children are not members of the school; and that many of God's people appear to regard it only as an institution to keep children still three fourths of an hour upon the Lord's day.* For this reason, many Sabbath schools are in an ever-languishing state. "Want of teachers!" "want of teachers!" is the perpetual cry. Very often the superintendent is compelled to ask the world for a teacher without religion to take charge of a class for whom he cannot find a willing teacher in the church. And when the concert of prayer arrives, the precious season in which believing souls should unite their supplications in behalf of the pupils, how often is it true that more men of the world than men of the church are there! Who would suppose, from the general demonstration of interest on such occasions by the

* See Appendix, G.

mass of believers in our churches, that the destiny of immortal souls is involved in the prosperity of this institution? Who would imagine that it is an acknowledged and efficient agency in a world's salvation?

It is high time that the Church be aroused from her insensibility to the vantage ground which God has given her in the work of saving men. She does not appreciate the potent weapons with which God has equipped her for the conquest of earth. Hence it will be my object briefly to point out the chief duties of Christian professors in relation to the Sabbath school.

They should become members of it themselves. We are aware that good excuses exist with some for not becoming members. Old age, sickness, family cares, and other things I need not name, may sometimes excuse professing Christians from attendance. It is not my object to specify what may or may not excuse a Christian from becoming a permanent member of this institution; that is a controversy between himself and his God. Let each one feel that in this respect he is accountable to his Master, and that by his own excuses he will stand or fall, and doubtless his decision will be on the side of right. Our remarks apply where there is no real excuse existing. We speak in general terms of Christian duty in this regard, recognizing that exceptions may exist; not, indeed, meaning that our re-

marks should apply to those only who could attend *as well as not*, but to those who might possibly attend by some planning, inconvenience, and self-denial.

Make it the first principle, then, *the Christian should feel conscience-bound to become a constant member of the Sabbath school*. How beautifully consonant with his profession! He professes to be guided in his life by the Scriptures; how proper that he should meet with old and young to become more familiar with them! He confesses his ignorance of divine things; how suitable that he should meet with others to be taught! He preaches reverence for the sacred record; how fit that he should display it by the weekly practice of meeting with others for its study! He urges others to attend — a careless sinner, perhaps; how necessary that he add force to his counsel by his own presence and devout attention! He would gather the impenitent of all classes and conditions into its pale; can he expect that they will be interested to study the Bible in this capacity if he exhibits no interest himself? Will the world sustain, by their presence, this institution, if the church forsake it? Rather, will not the interest of impenitent youth and adults be somewhat graduated by the apparent interest of God's people?

The followers of Christ generally would have their children members. Know they not the power

of parental example in relation to any and every object? Behold they not the strong bands which unite the members of their families as one, and through which every word and act of a parent becomes the admitted rule of right? "What mightier power to mould the spirit than that which streams forth from the parent upon the child through all the years of its growth up to manhood?" Who can contemplate the relation of father and mother to their children, shedding down upon them the influence of their example, without being impressed with the importance of every parental act? And whose example is more likely to be pure and salutary than that of the man who looks upon the young immortals committed to his care and guidance, and reflects that they are deciding a destiny that will reveal itself when the sun and stars drop from the firmament? Such a one is likely to measure the influence of his example in attending upon the means of grace under consideration. If such attendance adds only a distant probability of moral good to his children, he feels constrained to give it the full force of his example. His conscience troubles him if he does not.

That children will generally be more interested in this weekly Bible study if their parents attend, we think no candid observer of passing events can deny; and this consideration alone ought to be sufficient to insure their attendance. There is many a parent who would scarcely know what or how to

reply if a child should retort to his appeal in behalf of the Sabbath school, "If it is so important, then why do you not attend yourself?" Every Christian parent should be careful that his example go to sustain this much-neglected institution.

Professors of religion should see that their CHILDREN are members. Better, far better, that children do as they please in matters pertaining to secular pursuits than in those things which decide the moral character. If there be any moral advantage, or even the flattering *prospect* of any, in this means of grace, Christian parents should not allow it to be rejected at the pleasure of son or daughter. If there be any duties which ought to be insisted upon and enforced by parental commandment, they are those which relate to the soul. And yet, how often are children rigidly controlled in secular concerns, and left to their own choice in respect to moral duties!

Children generally entertain many erroneous views in regard to the Sabbath school; and very few there are who would voluntarily become members of it; that is, few would decide to attend without some counsels and persuasion. They suppose there can be no special need of their attendance; they imagine it is not honorable to sit down as learners of the Scriptures when they enter upon their teens; and some even suppose it is not particularly reputable at any time of life to study the Bible in this capacity. Leave a child to the sway of such

dangerous errors, and there is little hope of his forming an unsullied moral character. Parents may readily eradicate all such untruthful sentiments from the hearts of their children if attacked before they are deeply rooted. There are numerous examples in the secular and political world to show that the man who is distinguished for his knowledge of the Bible is honored by his fellow-men. If any of our prominent politicians and statesmen become teachers in the Sabbath school, the fact is trumpeted abroad as a very creditable thing. Even the most *godless* news sheets never present it in any other than an honorable light; thus indirectly paying a proper respect to this noble institution.

Almost every Christian parent has tact and talent enough to explode every such dangerous subterfuge. And since they all confess that they themselves greatly need to learn much more of the Bible, they must especially perceive that their children need the same. Then, shall they allow their children to reject the proffered blessing when they please? When superintendent and teachers are toiling to gather in the sons and daughters of irreligious parents, shall the children of any Christian parents be the absentees? If such are allowed to turn their backs upon this great privilege, then how can we reasonably urge non-professors to send their offspring? May not the cavilling parent turn upon us with a keen

rebuke, "When the children of the church attend, then I will send mine"?

For example's sake, for the sake of consistency, if not for Christ's and the soul's sake, the members of every church should *insist* upon the attendance of their children. *Their* households should be ensamples, in this respect, to the households of unconverted parents, whom we invite and urge to unite with us.

And more: does not the Christian parent believe that the influence of this means of grace upon his children will prepare them to resist the temptations of the world? Will not a son, familiar with the Bible, be far more likely to withstand the tide of worldliness which sets against him? And is not the pious father aware that tempters of every sort, from the alluring angel of light down to the veriest demon, beset the pathway of his son? Does he not know that the most fascinating, stealthy temptations are far the most dangerous and powerful? Is he not aware that even morality itself is sometimes allured by the song of the siren into the haunts of vice, all the while dreaming only of rapturous music and Eden bowers?

We are told of an ancient bay along the Mediterranean Sea, where the winding shore brought the winds and waves together so as to create the most enchanting music, and lead the passing sailor to

enter; but his vessel struck the sunken rocks, and he speedily went down to an ocean grave. Fit symbol, this, of the manner in which the arch-deceiver decoys even the most promising sons into his gins and pitfalls.

Has the Christian parent no confidence in Bible lessons to preserve the child from such destroyers? If he has, for the sake of his perilled sons, for the sake of hunted virtue, for the sake of hopes temporal and eternal, let him see that his children are members of the Sabbath school.

The followers of Christ should cheerfully become TEACHERS. Here is found a very common obstacle to the prosperity of this institution. Many Christians are unwilling to instruct a class. They resist every plea, and are unmoved by every encouragement. They will be scholars, but utterly refuse to be teachers. Their excuses are various, though the most common one is, that *they are not qualified to instruct*; and they never will be if they continue to excuse themselves from filling an office in which they have peculiar advantages and inducements to qualify themselves. That a Christian may have a good excuse for refusing to teach here, we readily admit. The same good reasons that exist for his absence from this weekly gathering will excuse him from becoming a teacher.

But that so many can be excused *for lack of qualification* as plead it we do not believe. There may

be those in the church who have too little talent and tact to expound the Scriptures; (we have seen some of this class;) but there are not half so many as would be glad to make this plea sufficient. With the helps which may be obtained at small expense, in the shape of commentaries and kindred works, very few of the members of our churches will God excuse on this ground. If they suppose that a teacher ought to be competent to expound the Scriptures *without study*, then, indeed, may they plead their poor qualifications; and so may the whole host of religious teachers that are employed throughout the land. The best teacher is he who studies his lesson most thoroughly. He may possess brilliant talents and good sense; but if he has a pious heart he will not dare to teach the Bible without study.

I repeat, then, with the study which every teacher ought to bestow upon every lesson, very few members of our churches can be excused for want of qualifications. They do well to remember the parable of the buried talent. While they who have *five* talents have a great share of responsibility, he who has only a *single one* has just *one fifth* as much laid upon himself. The wicked servant who buried his one talent seemed to think that, while they who had five times as many must do a great deal for the Lord; *he* was excused from *all* obligation. Mistaken man! Why did he not perceive that *five* just such men as himself could do as much for Christ as *one*

five-talented brother? There may be many persons in our churches having a single talent only; but the aggregate shows a large amount of obligation. And the truth of the parable is, that a man with the smallest endowments is just as responsible for them to God as are they who have received more abundantly from the great Giver. Hence the issue is this: If a church has enough members of ten, five, and two talents to meet the wants of the school, then, indeed, may those of a single talent be excused; but if they have not a sufficient number of the former, the latter class cannot possibly be excused.

The prosperity of this institution in our land demands that this ruinous error be swept from the churches. The history of every Sabbath school, written out, would contain more than one parable of the buried talent. There is talent enough in almost every church to render this plan of moral training, with the blessing of God, interesting and prosperous. But good men, holy men, and praying men, even, have been so accustomed to make sepulchres of their heads and hearts, in which to bury God's precious gifts, that we need a resurrection to rend the bolts and bars, and bring forth the dead things from their burial-places to the light of day. Happy, happy period for the religious instruction of the young when every Christian shall say, "I will do what I can"!

Happy day, too, for the church! for the teacher's work is an enviable discipline to the Christian. It brings into healthy exercise the powers of his mind and the graces of his heart. It makes him a more active and efficient member of Christ's flock, and increases his interest in the prosperity of religion and the salvation of men.

Let the Christian inquire, then, "Am I wanted as a teacher?" and not say, "I must be excused from filling such an office." If he cannot do as well or as much as others, he can, nevertheless, do something. What he can do as a teacher let him resolve to do. Let him never see a scarcity of teachers without trying to add *one* to their number.

Christians should PRAY for the Sabbath school. How seldom is it made the subject of prayer except at the monthly concert! And yet the church calls it her "NURSERY," the moral garden in which she cultivates immortal plants for the paradise above. The husbandman has a plat of ground, mellow and rich, covered over with all kinds of trees, and promising to yield more than twelve manner of fruit. It is his "nursery." It is a valuable spot to him, and its culture demands much of his time and attention. With the gray dawn of morning he is in its midst, pruning, training, grafting, budding, digging, watching. He looks out from the window of his habitation upon it, and his heart rejoices to see its bloom. How many secular hopes are connected with that nursery!

Let there not be less interest in the "nursery" of the church. Pray for it. At the family altar, in secret places, on all proper occasions, supplicate the Most High to bestow his benediction upon it. It is the Lord's garden. How interested ought every one of his Christian believers to be in its successful culture !

Christians should beware that the instructions of the Sabbath school do not supersede those of the family. The sagacious Dr. Emmons did not favor this institution when first established in this country, on the ground that parents would become comparatively faithless at home by substituting its lessons for the moral and religious instructions of the family. Not that such a consequence was *necessary*; but that parents would allow themselves to think there was less need of such counsels at home. The results have proved that the venerable divine was quite a prophet. Christians should be upon their watch at this point. The Sabbath school was never designed to be a substitute for religious teaching in the household, but an effective AUXILIARY.

In conclusion, I press this subject upon the conscience of every saint. Is not here great responsibility, imperative duty ? I put it to you, professing Christians, who scarcely think of this method of blessing the young from one year's end to another ; I put it to you who have so little interest in this institution as not to know whether it prosper or not ; I



put it to you, delinquent professors, who are not a member of it, when you might be there as well as not ; I put it to you whose children are among the absentees when those of your godless neighbors are constant attendants ; I put it to you who refuse to teach, and, to your discredit, see the world furnish non-professors to do the work which you ought to perform yourselves, — is it not dishonorable to the church of Christ ?

CHAPTER VII.

MISSIONARY SEWING CIRCLE.

Character of Dorcas. — Female Influence in the Missionary Enterprise. — Benefits of Sewing Circle. — It affords Opportunity for social Intercourse. — For intellectual Improvement. — Benefits the Participant morally and spiritually. — Furnishes Means to spread the Gospel. — Statistics showing Amount contributed by Sewing Circles. — Three Evils to avoid. — Levity and Worldliness. — Discord. — Converting Association into a Tattling Society. — Appeal to Females. — Dorcas a "Sister of Charity."

"THEN PETER AROSE, AND WENT WITH THEM. WHEN HE WAS COME, THEY BROUGHT HIM INTO THE UPPER CHAMBER: AND ALL THE WIDOWS STOOD BY HIM WEeping, AND SHEWING THE COATS AND GARMENTS WHICH DORCAS MADE, WHILE SHE WAS WITH THEM."* What a eulogy upon departed female excellence! Not all the inspiration of eloquence and song can pronounce a praise so pure and honest. The orator may be hollow hearted in his adulations, and the poet may be borne away on the wings of a reckless muse in his proffered elegy; but in the

* Acts ix. 39.

bursting language of grief there is no hypocrisy. In the sobs and tears of those who have received blessings at the hand of the deceased there is honest gratitude and respect. The exhibition of the coats and garments which a benevolent woman has made for the poor is a fit memorial of her lustrous virtues. Give me such love and reverence as the needy have displayed in the death chamber of their benefactors, and all the honors of rank and office may pass as meretricious bawbles. To be a Dorcas on earth is an honorable distinction, to which every woman will do well to aspire. The Dorcas of earth is the seraph of the skies.

Little is known of Dorcas except that she had regard to the wants of the poor, and labored with her hands to lighten the pressure of their poverty. As if this were enough to embalm her memory in the hearts of the good through all coming time, there is simply recorded the fact of her humble deeds of charity. And even from this her name has become the index of whatsoever is lovely and of good report. It is made the significant appellation of many female benevolent associations. "THE DORCAS SOCIETY" is a name which defines at once its charitable designs. To say that a female lived "Dorcas-like," is to pronounce upon her the eulogium which Christ pronounced upon the woman of Bethany who poured the ointment from her alabaster box upon his feet — "SHE HATH DONE WHAT SHE COULD."

Female influence is poorly appreciated even by females themselves. If I mistake not, there is a kind of sentiment prevailing in their ranks that they have little to do with the salvation of the world; that this responsibility rests upon the male sex. And, on the other hand, are not the males too generally disposed to attach little value to female influence in the reformation of mankind? Are they not wont to plan and execute in the great missionary enterprise without attaching much importance to the Christian labors of woman in her appropriate sphere? Whence is such an opinion derived? Who dare define the limit of woman's obligation in this matter, and say, *Thus far thy responsibilities run, and no farther?* Indeed, in proportion to the means and opportunities for usefulness enjoyed, are not ten females under as weighty obligations in the cause of Christ as are ten males? Then does it become us to weigh carefully the efficiency and importance of female influence in bringing back our revolted world to God.

In general, it may be said that female influence penetrates the social fabric. Independent of the power of *maternal* influence, that which emanates from other spheres of female effort exerts a mighty power upon the destinies of the race. Even a superficial observation will disclose this truth in almost any village or neighborhood; and what is true in

this particular in the humblest circle, is true, on a large scale, of the whole world.

That females are capable of making moral achievements which well compare with those of males, on missionary fields, is a truth corroborated by the history of the missionary enterprise. So long as the name of Harriet Newell is associated in human hearts with moral courage and valiant self-denial, there is needed no elaborate argument to prove the capabilities of the female sex in this respect. For accomplishment of good among the poor and suffering in prisons and stifled attics — for power over the hearts of the debased and wretched — for the consistent living and diffusion of a charitable spirit — there is needed no other proof that woman is not a whit inferior to man than the marked career of Mrs. Fry, Mrs. Opie, and Lady Huntingdon. To the first, a writer of some celebrity applies the distinguished tribute which Burke paid to the immortal Howard: "She visited all Europe, not to survey the sumptuousness of palaces or the stateliness of temples; not to make accurate measurements of the remains of ancient grandeur, nor to form a scale of the curiosities of modern art; not to collect medals, nor collate manuscripts; but to dive into the depths of dungeons, to plunge into the infections of hospitals, to survey the mansions of sorrow and pain; to take the gauge and dimensions of misery, depression, and

contempt; to remember the forgotten, to attend to the neglected, to visit the forsaken, and to compare and collate the miseries of all men in all countries. Her plan was original; it was as full of genius as of humanity. It was a voyage of discovery — a circumnavigation of charity. Already the benefit of her labor is felt more or less in every country." For enduring patience and all-conquering perseverance, as elements of female character in every good work, we have only to refer to the memory of MARY LYON, the savor of whose self-denying life is yet ascending to the skies from the summit of Holyoke.

True, all females cannot toil in such important spheres, nor in such conspicuous ways; and, in contrast with the lives of such women as are named above, the ordinary methods of doing good may seem of little importance. Also, in contrast with the large contributions to the work of missions from other sources, the yearly avails of a village sewing circle may seem as the small dust of the balance. But it must be remembered that the aggregated littles in all the enterprises of earth swell to a surprising total. Drops make the boundless ocean, and particles lift the everlasting hills. The pennies that are cast into the Lord's treasury, if they do not equal, make no mean amount beside the dollars; and so the sum total of what is done by missionary sewing circles in our land, (as we shall see in an-

other place,) though far less than it ought to be, swells to a very respectable amount.

“Despise not thou a small thing, either for evil or for good ;
For a look may work thy ruin, or a word create thy wealth.
Commit thy trifles unto God, for to him is nothing trivial.” *

In presenting the claims of the MISSIONARY SEWING CIRCLE as an efficient agency for good, we shall not confine our remarks simply to its moral and religious benefits, but shall also enumerate some of the minor advantages which it confers.

IT AFFORDS OPPORTUNITY FOR SOCIAL INTERCOURSE. In large congregations, especially those of our larger towns and cities, it is almost the only opportunity afforded to many families to form acquaintance with each other. Were it not for this occasional gathering, such congregations would be composed of numerous little circles unknown to each other. There would be a lack of interest in the mass of its members, and hence far less interest in the general affairs of the society, because of the numerous strangers who fill the pews upon the Sabbath. In all religious societies, however small their numbers, there is needed a degree of social communion in order to insure mutual and general coöperation. This is had by the males in the common intercourse of business and daily toil. The domestic duties and more private sphere of female action render some such

* Tupper.

method of intercourse essential to cultivate acquaintance and friendship among the more secluded sex. It brings them together, too, in such circumstances as to guaranty a more careful regard to good sense and manners than is usually incident to morning calls and afternoon visiting. It is an excellent substitute for gadding and frivolous visitation.

In the missionary sewing circle, also, the pastor enjoys an opportunity to meet a portion of his charge much oftener than it were possible to see them at their homes. He becomes more familiar with them, and, if at all fitted to make himself a congenial spirit, thus strengthens the bonds of mutual attachment. He becomes more interested in them and they in him. The pastor of a large city congregation remarked to a friend, "It would be well nigh impossible for me to keep up acquaintance with all of my people, so many are continually coming and going, unless it were for the missionary sewing circle. This I always attend, *chiefly* to become more familiar with my people."

That a congregation will be more deeply concerned for their prosperity, that there will be a stronger mutual regard between pastor and people, when a general, harmonious, social intercourse allows few to be strangers, is alike the dictate of reason and the testimony of observation and experience. Hence this incidental benefit of the sewing

circle urges its claims upon the attention of woman, whether in or out of the church.

INTELLECTUAL IMPROVEMENT is another blessing which is incident to this missionary gathering. Reading biographical, historical, or moral and religious books of marked intellectual character, is better for saint or sinner than the reading of novels or other literary trash. On a single page of the former is more practical knowledge and refinement of learning than in whole volumes of the latter; and such useful reading is usually quite an item in the transactions of the sewing circle. It is not necessarily confined to missionary intelligence, but may consistently embrace works of practical utility and such as are full of useful knowledge. Is not here an object important enough to demand a portion of the time and attention of females? May not a strong, sensible mind realize here a sort of intellectual repast? Can a better plan be devised as a substitute for the meaningless and profitless conversation which so often characterizes social assemblies?

There is A MORAL AND RELIGIOUS BENEFIT to the participators in the exercises of this charitable circle. It enlists the sympathies in behalf of the poor and perishing; it cultivates the benevolent affections; it fosters the spirit of kindness and good will; it rebukes selfishness, and increases tenderness of heart; it enforces the divine injunction, to "rejoice with

them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep." That such is the *tendency* of benevolent associations, no person who has a proper view of the relation of cause and effect will deny. Hence the great moral advantage to those who meet in such charity circles. The noblest elements of human nature are bidden into life; the purest sentiments and emotions are appealed to with power; the loveliest adornment to female character is fashioned; for, among all the charms and embellishments of female character, sympathy, kindness, generosity, and true benevolence are prominent. All the finery and tinsel beauty of art, and all devotion to fashion and true politeness, cannot suffice for the absence of these brilliant virtues. And these are the coveted gifts which the missionary circle proffers, in goodly measure, to those who cheerfully seek to enjoy its privileges; these are the high attainments to which it points the woman of moral aim and honorable resolve; these are the jewels of priceless value which secure a passport for woman into the choicest companies of life.

The chief object of this agency is, however, to FURNISH MEANS FOR THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL OVER THE EARTH. It is so unassuming and noiseless that it appears to accomplish little. It seems like a small way to aid in the accomplishment of a great design; but a few facts which have been collated for this purpose will serve to present the truth in

this particular. The amount done by one of these female organizations in a given period, as a year, or a series of years, is far in advance of our ordinary suppositions. The following statistics will exhibit what might be accomplished if the female influence of every evangelical congregation in the land were enlisted in this work : —

Size of congregations.				Annual avails of missionary circles.			
1.	About 225 average attendance.			An average of \$175 for last few years.			
2.	"	400	" "	" "	309	" "	" "
3.	"	450	" "	" "	100	" "	" "
4.	"	350	" "	" "	150	" "	" "
5.	"	200	" "	" "	75	" "	" "
6.	"	200	" "	" "	310	" "	" "
7.	"	400	" "	" "	450	" "	" "
8.	"	500	" "	" "	200	" "	" "
9.	"	350	" "	" "	250	" "	" "

The author has not selected the above congregations because they are more distinguished than many others for amount accomplished in this humble way ; but he has gathered these statistics almost *indiscriminately* from pastors and otherwise. True, he has not sought statistics in congregations whose females are known to do little or nothing for benevolence in social circles. The above amounts set against the respective congregations were not all the avails of *sewing*, the making of " coats and garments," Dorcas-like, but embrace, also, whatever donations and collections of money were made in connection with said circles and by their direction. Sewing circles usually collect more or less money to defray the

expenses incident to sending boxes and barrels of clothing to distant fields. Many, also, hold annual fairs for the sale of their articles, in connection with which considerable amounts are collected for other things beside the articles which they have manufactured. Both of these items are embraced in the above statistics. One important item of female effort, however, *is not* embraced in the above tables. Within the limits of every congregation there are more or less of the poor and ignorant to be cared for. To supply their wants, the females in some religious societies support separate organizations, though in most of them contributions are frequently made to this object from the avails professedly collected for the more distant poor. It is difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain the amount done by sewing circles for the poor which they have always with them; therefore, no account is made of this in the statistics presented.

In addition to the above, I find, in a printed report of a benevolent society connected with a female seminary, the sum of \$271 75 reported as the avails of their society in 1848.

When the Sailors' Home, which was recently burned in Boston, was erected, it was wholly furnished by the Boston Ladies' Seamen's Friend Society, aided by sewing circles in the country; and by female sewing circles the new Sailors' Home, containing one hundred rooms, was entirely fur-

nished ; thus contributing the very respectable amount of, at least, three thousand dollars (the cost of furnishing the Home) to this worthy object.

In a communication from the assistant treasurer* of the American and Foreign Christian Union, he says, concerning the aid which was rendered to the Portuguese exiles who were driven from their island home by the relentless fury of Papal persecution, "My estimate of the value of the articles received during our pleadings for that interesting people could not have been much less than TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS, if, indeed, it did not exceed that amount." Doubtless, for most of this large contribution that persecuted people were indebted to females through their various organizations. It was the response of sewing circles to the call of the Christian Union.

The corresponding secretary† of the American Seamen's Friend Society states, in a letter to the author, that a young ladies' sewing circle in Brooklyn, New York, consisting of only *twenty-five* members, paid into the treasury of the Seamen's Society the large sum of FIVE THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FIVE DOLLARS, in the space of *twelve years*. And what adds particular interest to the fact is, that said circle originated in "a few girls meeting together to learn to sew." In the same communication the secre-

* Edward Vernon, Esq.

† Rev. John Spaulding.

tary says, "Ladies' associations for doing good are like mountain springs; they not only adorn and bless their origin, but cover the valleys with beauty and fertility. A golden mine in a country parish might be a good thing; a pure silver spring far better; and, better than all, the heart and hand of female enterprise in doing good. That minister is to be congratulated, if not envied, who has a Tryphena, and Tryphosa, and a beloved Persis in his parish to join him in laboring much in the Lord. * * * May such circles, such oases, be multiplied in this desert world."

Such are some of the results of female enterprise in the missionary sewing circle. They clearly establish the sentiments advanced in the commencement of this chapter respecting the efficiency of this organization. They show, beyond controversy, that it is no unimportant agency to be employed in saving the lost. They prove that it is an association of great moral power, owned and blessed of God.

There are three warnings, having regard to as many evils, which may be tendered to the members of female missionary associations.

Let not your gatherings be characterized by levity and worldliness. While social intercourse is one of the valuable blessings derived therefrom, it has its limits of propriety and usefulness. If sociality is the sole object of the circle, it will be likely to depreciate into mere worldly conversation. While the

meetings should be of such a social character as to interest the intelligent and noble hearted, whether believers or unbelievers, no one should lose sight of the chief object for which they assemble as a *missionary* society.

Beware of discordant elements. Difference of opinion may arise in relation to plan of operation, the style of work to be wrought, and the object for which to toil. All cannot always be suited. Some may frequently be obliged to surrender personal feelings and opinions to the will of the greater number. In all such instances, Christian kindness and accommodation should abound for the welfare of the society. If a majority of the circle decide to labor for a cause in which some of the members are not especially interested, the minority ought not to make it the occasion for diminution of effort. If the officers are not agreeable to all because they are regarded inefficient or otherwise unqualified, this ought not to cause any member to slacken her diligence or withhold her aid. And, of course, it is the clearest dictate of reason that personal differences and animosities should never disgrace this or any other gathering of females.

Convert not your association into a tattling society. There are nobler themes of conversation in the social circle than the faults of neighbors or the rumors of the street. It is not becoming to labor for the salvation of a heathen soul, and, at the same time,

talk into disrepute the character of man or woman. Censoriousness does not greatly increase a missionary spirit, nor exemplify the sweet temper of Christ. Such license of the tongue contributes little to social and intellectual improvement, and adds a singular chapter to the stores of missionary knowledge. Mrs. Sigourney, in her beautiful letter to the females of the land, has given utterance to a paragraph which might be wisely incorporated into the constitution of every sewing circle: "If thou art bidden to a feast of mangled reputations, sit not unduly long, nor lift with complacence the cup in which thy neighbor's faults are infused. Through the same process of fermentation thine own good name may also pass; for at the wine press of slander there is no respect of persons. The sour grape that setteth the teeth on edge, and the rich cluster from the valley of Eshcol, which the Lord commended, go in alike, and the mingled wine is pleasant to the perverted palate."

In view of the great benefits resulting from this organization, as now imperfectly discussed, we urge its claims upon the attention of Christian females. Can there be a more worthy object presented for your coöperation in connection with social intercourse? We appeal to you, Christian woman, who have seldom, if ever, attended these useful gatherings, is not here a rare opportunity for innocent

enjoyment and extensive usefulness? Will three hours, devoted to this benevolent purpose once or twice in a month, be time misimproved or thrown away? From the numerous cares and duties of the family, could not an occasional afternoon or evening, at least, be spared for this important meeting? Is it really an absolute necessity that prevents your connection with this circle, or is it a lack of interest in the object itself? Have you ever reflected upon the vast amount which females might accomplish in the missionary enterprise, if all of them who are in our churches should engage heartily in this work? Have you ever pondered the sum total that would be withholden from the treasury of the Lord if all Christian females should refuse to coöperate in this plan of doing good? While the devoted female missionary is toiling amid privations and hardships in lands of moral darkness, shall not her Christian sisters at home display their abounding interest in her success and comfort by attendance upon this monthly or semi-monthly meeting?

That many can furnish ample reasons for refusing to unite with others in this capacity we do not doubt; but that only those already attend these meetings who can best go is not true. The history of almost any sewing circle, as well as that of every Sabbath school and prayer meeting, shows that some whom we might least expect to be present are in constant

attendance. The fact is submitted for the careful consideration of every female reader.

What shall we say of unconverted females? Has this association any claim upon their time and attention? It certainly has. In common with the converted portion of their sex, they owe their social and moral elevation above the families of heathen countries to the gospel of Christ. Where the Bible has not shed its benign influence, there woman is degraded to servile obedience and the wretchedness of the slave. One of the most disgusting and heart-rending features of heathenism is the degradation of the female sex. It is only in Christian lands, amid the light and blessings of the gospel of purity, that woman is elevated to her proper sphere and permitted to enjoy her Heaven-ordained amenities. Hence, by the obligations of gratitude and self-respect, she is called upon to coöperate with others in diffusing that gospel which has made her to differ from the females of a Turkish harem or an African kraal.

In conclusion, I present the example of Dorcas, the "sister of charity," as a model of female worth and usefulness. May females aspire after her excellence, and pattern from her generous charities for the poor. May they render themselves as useful to the lowly, and thus commend their lives to the admiration of the high. May they be so mind-

ful of the wants and woes of others, that, when they die, weeping and loving crowds may press around their coffins to tell of the "coats and garments" which were wrought by their hands for the sons and daughters of penury. The memory of Dorcas is sweeter than even that of Josephine.

CHAPTER VIII.

MATERNAL ASSOCIATION.

Power of Association. — Origin of Maternal Association. — Design of it. — Power of Mothers' Encouragement to. — The Opinion of a South American Statesman. — Mothers of Bishop Hall, John Quincy Adams, Knill, Todd, and Cowper. — Benefits of Maternal Association. — Creates Sympathy between Mothers thus associated. — Imparts Knowledge of best Mode of Parental Discipline. — Increases Sense of Parental Responsibility. — Makes more faithful. — Report of London Maternal Association. — God has blessed this Meeting to the Salvation of many. — A Fact. — Statistics of Conversions gathered from Reports. — Appeal to Mothers.

ASSOCIATION! At this period of human progress we begin to understand its power as an agency for social weal or woe. Scarcely any enterprise is prosecuted with success until its potent influence is evoked. It is a combination of sympathies, views, feelings, hopes, aims, power, whose "union is strength." It is a confederacy of hearts and hands to achieve in a common cause. It is simple, yet forcible; unassuming, yet progressive; more or less silent, but sure. This is true, in general, of associated strength for the prosecution of all enterprises;

but appears in a light of special interest when its object is the training of CHILDHOOD.

MOTHER! It is a word of peculiar charm and potency, reviving delightful recollections, and begetting such a class of emotions as are incident to the thought of a guardian spirit. Scarcely a heart can be found so hardened by a course of vice that it will not yield to the charm of this precious name. The cares of business, the corruptions of vice, the infirmities of age steel not the heart against its power. It arrests the vicious wanderer, and sends bitter regrets piercing through the soul. It overpowers the hardy tar, fresh from the rough service of the sea, and sends the warm tear trickling down his callous cheek. And thus in a thousand ways the poet's verse is verified:—

“And there's a charm of sacred power
Dwells in the name of mother.”

Hence, combining the first with a derivative of the second, we have an appellation which clusters all the above considerations about itself, and becomes at once suggestive, attractive, pathetic, and commanding—the MATERNAL ASSOCIATION.

It originated with Mrs. Payson, of Portland, Maine, in the following manner, as given in her own words: “I know not that there are maternal associations in all our villages; but I know that there are many in our country, and some in India, in a very flourishing

condition. Our institution was formed in 1815. You ask the circumstances which led to its formation. A very dear friend of mine, who died about that time, had often lamented that, in our social prayer meetings, children were so much neglected. I was privileged to meet with her occasionally, and spend an hour in prayer for our children; but neither of us thought of a *special* meeting for them. After her death, my husband often, in our secret prayers, appeared earnestly to desire that I might be made useful out of my little family, which then occupied almost all my time, and greatly exhausted my spirits. While holding my dear Caroline in my arms, and thinking of my deceased friend's solicitude for her children, the entire plan of our association presented itself to my mind like an agreeable vision; and I took my pencil and sketched down the items, and showed them to my husband, who was highly gratified, and felt that prayer was answered. *He thought it would be one great instrument in bringing on that glorious period when all shall know the Lord."* *

A want of the age seemed to be met. Christian mothers in our evangelical churches hailed this institution as the harbinger of great good to the rising generation. For a succession of years maternal associations multiplied rapidly throughout New England, and, indeed, in all the states of the Union, as

* Mothers' Magazine, January, 1833, p. 6.

well as in England and at most of the missionary stations connected with A. B. C. F. Missions. It is stated that, at a meeting of a county association, held at Keene, New Hampshire, in 1837, it was reported that, in the twenty-two towns in the county, there were then seventeen maternal associations, comprising four hundred and thirty-seven mothers and twelve hundred and twenty-four children.* Nor was this county distinguished above many others in this regard. The fact may be taken as an illustration of the general interest awakened throughout the land in this new Christian enterprise.

The *design* of this association is Christian in the highest and most comprehensive sense, and may be briefly stated as follows: To bring mothers together to consult concerning the best means of rearing their children for usefulness and heaven; to cause them to feel the responsibilities of their station, that they may discharge their duties with increased fidelity; and to unite in prayer for the salvation of their offspring.

THE POWER OF MOTHERS is the chief consideration as the basis of such a movement. It is generally conceded that the mother's influence extends to social and civil interests; for the education of those who control the destiny of the race begins, not in the school room, but in the nursery; not with a book,

* Mothers' Magazine.

but with the smile, the look, the word, the spirit, the example of the mother. Rousseau had this in view when he said, "The mother's milk should be the milk of liberty."

Some years ago, a sagacious statesman from one of the South American republics, who had long mourned over the failure at self-government in his own country, came to the United States for the purpose of examining our institutions and learning the secret of our prosperity. One of the first scenes which he witnessed was a military display; and, supposing the enthusiasm that prevailed was indicative of a general passion for arms, he remarked, "That, sir, will ruin you. It is the passion of the people for war, and their reliance on the sword to carry their points, which has been our bane and ruin in South America; and unless you check it in season, it will prove your ruin, too." But afterwards he spent an evening in New Haven, where males and females of the most accomplished class in the city were assembled; and, on retiring from the party, he said, "I have found it now. I have ascertained the secret of your success in self-government, and of your character, prosperity, and greatness as a republic. You owe it to your women. I never saw the like before. SUCH MOTHERS must, and no others can, make a nation like yours. Give us in South America such women for mothers, and we should, ere long, follow hard after you in the race of national prosperity and happiness."

We are accustomed to speak of the achievements of such men as Bacon, Hall, Newton, Dwight, Edwards, and a host of like renown, without duly appreciating the world's indebtedness to their gifted and faithful mothers. That maternal influence had much to do in preparing them for spheres of extensive usefulness, is evident from such facts as the following.

Bishop Hall acknowledged maternal agency in the formation of his own character, and, on one occasion, wrote of his mother, "How often have I blessed the memory of those divine passages of experimental divinity which I have heard from her mouth! What day did she pass without a large task of private devotion? whence she would still come forth with a countenance of undissembled mortification. Never any lips have read to me such feeling lectures of piety; neither have I known any soul that more accurately practised them than her own."

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS once paid the following tribute to his mother: "It is due to gratitude and nature that I should acknowledge and avow that, such as I have been, whatever it was, such as I am, whatever it is, and such as I hope to be in all futurity, must be ascribed, under Providence, to the precepts and example of my mother."

The following very interesting testimony of Rev. Richard Knill is quoted at length: "I have a vivid

recollection of the effect of maternal influence. My honored mother was a religious woman, and she watched over and instructed me as pious mothers are accustomed to do. Alas ! I often forgot her admonitions ; but in my most thoughtless days I never lost the impressions which her holy example had made on my mind.

“ After spending a large portion of my life in foreign lands, I returned again to visit my native village. Both my parents died while I was in Russia, and their house is now occupied by my brother. The furniture remains just the same as when I was a boy ; and at night I was accommodated with the same bed in which I had often slept before ; but my busy thoughts would not let me sleep. I was thinking how God had led me through the journey of life. At last the light of the morning darted through the little window, and then my eye caught a sight of the spot where my sainted mother, forty years before, took me by the hand, and said, ‘ Come, my dear, kneel down with me, and I will go to prayer.’

“ This completely overcame me. I seemed to hear the very tones of her voice ; I recollected some of her expressions ; and I burst into tears, and arose from my bed, and fell upon my knees just on the spot where my mother kneeled, and thanked God that I had once a praying mother. And O, if every parent could feel what I felt then, I am sure they would pray with their children, as well as pray for them.”

Equally to the point and touching is the following incident in the life of Dr. Todd, as related by himself. His mother was deprived of her reason when he was a child; and, referring to this, he says, "I can recollect that, when a very little child, I was standing at the open window, at the close of a lovely summer's day. The large, red sun was just sinking away behind the western hills; the sky was gold and purple commingled; the winds were sleeping; and a soft, solemn stillness seemed to hang over the earth. I was watching the sun as he sent his yellow rays through the trees, and felt a kind of awe though I knew not wherefore. Just then my mother came to me. She was raving with frenzy; for reason had long since left its throne, and her a victim of madness. She came up to me wild with insanity. I pointed to the glorious sun in the west, and in a moment she was calm. She took my little hands within hers and told me that 'the great God made the sun, the stars, the world — every thing; that he it was who made her little boy, and gave him an immortal spirit; that yonder sun, and the green fields, and the world itself will one day be burned up; but that the spirit of her child will then be alive, for he must live when heaven and earth are gone; that he must pray to the great God, and love and serve him forever.'

"She let go my hands — madness returned — she hurried away. I stood with my eyes filled with

tears, and my little bosom heaving with emotions which I could not have described ; but I can never forget the impressions which that conversation of my poor mother left upon me. O, what a blessing would it have been had the inscrutable providence of God given me a mother who could have repeated these instructions, accompanied by her prayers, through all the days of my childhood ! But ‘even so, Father ; for so it seemeth good in thy sight.’ ”

The influence of Cowper’s mother upon his character may be learned from the following expression of filial affection which he wrote to Lady Hesketh on the receipt of his mother’s picture : “ I had rather possess my mother’s picture than the richest jewel in the British crown ; for I loved her with an affection that her death, fifty years since, has not in the least abated.” And he penned the following lines on that occasion : —

“ My mother ! when I learned that thou wast dead,
Say, wast thou conscious of the tears I shed ?
Hovered thy spirit o’er thy sorrowing son,
Wretch even then, life’s journey just begun ?
Perhaps thou gav’st me, though unfelt, a kiss ;
Perhaps a tear, if souls can weep in bliss.
Ah, that maternal smile ! it answers, ‘ Yes ! ’ ”

Thus we might continue to quote from the testimony of distinguished men to illustrate the mother’s power.* We have omitted a reference to the eminent

* See Appendix, H.

mothers of Doddridge, Wesley, Dwight, Edwards, and others, because they are more familiar to the general reader. Volumes might be filled with facts similar to the above; for it is a truth of history, *that many of the best men have had the best mothers.**

Now, if such is the influence of the mother in her own individual relations, how great the encouragement for them to unite for mutual sympathy and co-operation in the maternal association! This circumstance invests her office with peculiar interest and responsibility. She has need of the counsel, observation, and experience of others. She wants just such aids as this association proffers, and just such blessings as this concert of prayer secures.

The following are some of the BENEFITS of the maternal meeting.

It creates a bond of sympathy between mothers thus associated. A common interest in a common and responsible work is awakened in their hearts. Each feels for the other, and each rejoices to learn of the successful efforts of the other in training children for Christ. This bond of sympathy is an indispensable element of success in the prosecution of any good work. It is the legitimate result of association in all enterprises. Mothers are in like circumstances, so far as relates to their families, and they have like

* See ERA FOR MOTHERS, in the author's volume, "HINTS FOR THE HOUSEHOLD."

wants and interests. Now, experience and observation have long since taught us that such persons have a strong affinity for each other. The widow's heart is drawn towards the widow; the bereaved especially sympathize with those in similar affliction; and thus on through a variety of relations. On the same principle, mothers will naturally sympathize with each other in the responsibilities of the household, and the maternal meeting will tend to strengthen the bond.

In the maternal association, mothers *acquire knowledge concerning the best mode of parental discipline*. One important exercise at the meetings of this body is the reading of the best publications upon this subject. Often various periodicals are taken by the association, and appropriate volumes purchased as a library for the use of the members. Each mother, too, has an experience and observation of her own, as well as original views derived therefrom, in regard to the training of children. This is communicated at the maternal gatherings for general edification. It is impossible that such a plan should not be of great advantage. In other departments of duty and human toil its utility is universally acknowledged. A marked illustration of it we find in the present plan of associating the teachers of our youth for the purpose of imparting their experience, and thus benefiting each other, in regard to the intellectual culture of the young; and if this plan subserves the cause

of education by benefiting instructors, why will not a similar gathering of the mothers subserve the cause of morals and religion by the wealth of wisdom it will add to their experience?

The maternal meeting *tends to increase the sense of parental responsibility in its members.* If the testimony of mothers who can speak from experience upon this subject were gathered, it would prove that they have gone home from this meeting impressed with a consciousness of the obligations imposed upon them, and prepared to enter their closets with a humbled heart and stronger faith. If no other benefit were derived from the mother's meeting, this alone would commend it to the female portion of the church as an agency of great good; for a lack of this sense of responsibility will account mainly for the careless hand with which even Christian mothers train their offspring. Few only realize what a solemn charge is committed to their direction—what momentous interests are involved in the discharge of their duties. Any agency that can make them sensible of this must be accounted important, since a recognition of one's responsibilities is always necessary to inspire good resolves and stimulate to effective effort.

There are many things occurring in the family, connected with the training of children, calculated to perplex and trouble—many things to exhaust patience and irritate the disposition; for the meeting

of which the mother can bring no better preparation than a just sense of her responsibilities.

Closely connected with the above is maternal FIDELITY, resulting naturally from a clear recognition of personal obligations. It detracts not at all from the mother's faithfulness at home to mingle with those of kindred relations at the maternal meeting. It rather sends her home to labor with greater assiduity for the instruction and salvation of her children. She teaches more intelligently, she guides more carefully, she prays more earnestly.

Since penning the above, I have seen, in the Mothers' Magazine, a report of the London Maternal Association, presented in 1836; and it accords so fully with what has been said, that I make the following extracts:—

“One result of these monthly meetings has been, to increase the sense of parental obligation; and, as this conviction has been deepened, mothers have been roused to greater watchfulness, and have been led to implore with more fervency those supplies of divine grace which alone can fit them for their important work.

“Another advantage has been, to strengthen the spirit of Christian love and tenderness. The oneness of their object, and its endearing character, have united the members to each other; and the frequent comparison they have been led to make between their privileges and the sad condition of

many others has increased their compassion for the whole family of mankind, and a proportionate desire to turn their influence, whatever it may be, to the best account.

“A third benefit connected with these meetings has been that of bringing important topics before the attention which had been too superficially regarded. Many have become better acquainted with their own resources and with the talents committed to their care. Others have detected the cause of failure in their past efforts ; and, not unfrequently, suggestions have been made, and encouragements offered, which God has graciously overruled, as a word in season to those who were weary.”

The chief benefit, however, of the maternal association remains to be considered. *God has blessed this humble agency to the salvation of many of the children connected with it.* Facts will fully substantiate the assertion, that, in those congregations where this organization has been well sustained, the children of the mothers belonging to it have been signally blessed. And that the result should be thus flattering might have been anticipated, not only on account of the promises of God, but also in consequence of certain other facts in regard to his answering mercies.

It is related by Rev. E. N. Kirk, that, in a particular church in the State of New York, several fathers set apart one evening in the week to meet and pray

for their children ; and, in fifteen years from the adoption of this plan, he (Mr. Kirk) was told that all their children were converted to Christ. The writer has recently heard a fact of equal interest related. During the progress of a work of grace in a congregation, a mother became intensely anxious for her son, who was in college. A circle of pious mothers deeply sympathized with her, and they devoted a certain evening to prayer on his behalf. Suffice it to say, subsequent intelligence announced to the mother that on that evening he gave his heart to God.*

True, here was no maternal association where mothers stately united in supplication for the same blessing ; but such facts involve the same principles, and show what benefits we might expect would result from this organization. They prepare us to appreciate the following authentic statistics.

The Maternal Association connected with the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Albany reported, in 1837, that eleven of their children had publicly professed their faith in Christ, and several more had become hopefully pious.

The association of Moriah, New York, reported, in 1836, " the hopeful conversion of fifteen or twenty belonging to the association, twelve of whom have united with the visible people of God."

* See Appendix, I.

The association in South Berwick, Maine, reported, in 1835, "Of those children who have become hopefully pious, fourteen have connected themselves with our church. Of these, three or four are looking forward to the ministry, two are already somewhat advanced in their course of theological studies, and two are in college. One has entered upon the responsible duties of a minister's wife, and others are prepared to occupy, and doubtless will occupy, important and responsible stations in society. A few others are indulging hope. The whole number who have become pious since the formation of the association (ten years) is between twenty and thirty." The same report records the case of a mother, a member of the association, whose intense desire for the salvation of her eight children always brought her to the monthly meetings; and she was frequently heard to remark, "that, whether she lived to see it or not, she confidently believed that all her children would be brought into the ark of safety." She died before the consummation of her wishes, and her eight children were subsequently converted, with a single exception. Five were sons, three of whom became ministers.

The Maternal Association of Chicago reported as follows, in 1834: "A few weeks after the formation of our society, our directress began to feel the importance of training her little ones for God, and an unusual spirit of prayer for the salvation of their souls.

Nor did she wait long for an answer to her petitions. A few weeks only had elapsed when *ten* of her family, including her husband, were hopefully converted to God."

In 1839, the Association of Dedham, Massachusetts, reported, "A goodly number of our children have professed their faith in Christ, and continue to walk worthy of their high vocation."

The Association of Springville, New York, reported, in 1839, "Since our organization, (four years,) nine of our children have indulged hope in Christ and united with the visible church."

In 1838, fourteen children connected with the Maternal Association of New Britain, Connecticut, were converted.

These statistics might be multiplied were it necessary. The above are sufficient to show that the blessing of God has rested upon this humble agency. Two facts, however, given in the reports of the New York City Maternal Association, in 1840, and that of Surrey Chapel, London, in 1839, are worthy of consideration.

The first reports that, at a regular meeting of the society, there was unusual fervency in the prayers of the members. Two young men, just entering upon the duties of active life, sons of two of their number, were made the subjects of special prayer. There was great wrestling for them, such as seldom had been witnessed in their midst. Within a few

weeks both of them embraced Christ, to the no small joy of the praying circle.

The second reports that a mother, connected with them, had a son who was a source of great grief to his parents and friends, and promised little else than shame and ruin. At one of their meetings, it was resolved to grant the mother's request, and spend the time in prayer for her prodigal son. God heard and answered their supplications. At a subsequent meeting, "this mother came, with a countenance beaming with joy, and stated that she believed the rebel son was converted to God; and she attributed it to the fulfilment of that gracious promise, 'If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.' " *

Such considerations attach greater importance to the maternal association than the little interest of mothers in its existence and prosperity, during the last ten years, appears to indicate. The deep interest of former days in this institution has, in a measure, passed away. A few of the aged women yet upon the stage still retain their attachment to it as a God-given agency; and happy would it be if their falling mantles were caught by the youthful mothers. But the ardor and zeal which sustained the enter-

* The author is indebted to the Mothers' Magazine for the above statistics.

prise in its early history, and the remarkable success which attended its beginning, has given place to apathy and general neglect of this means of maternal influence. Young mothers, with a few exceptions, do not connect themselves with this society, although they may be efficient and deeply interested in the sewing circle and other female associations. Judging from such a feature of the present age, it cannot be denied that a multitude of mothers fail to attach due importance to the maternal meeting; for, properly considered, this organization, having in view the training and salvation of children, is inferior in importance to no other. Duly appreciated, it would occupy the first place in the heart of the Christian mother. And here we leave the subject for the prayerful attention of those who bear the burden of maternal responsibilities.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE.

Will the World be converted? — Small Contributions imply it will not. — Contributions not increase in Proportion to Wealth. — The Pleasure Excursion. — Only one Half Cent given daily. — Family of Six Hundred Millions. — Few perceive that giving is for their good. — Little System in giving. — Hammond, Baxter, Doddridge, and others. — The Shoemaker. — Christians wait to give. — Opposition to Agents. — Ingenuity and Effort necessary to obtain a liberal Contribution. — Complain because so many Calls. — Some plead that "Charity begins at Home." — Refuse to give because of some Case of Imposition. — "We know not that the Money reaches the Heathen." — Some cry, "To what Purpose is this Waste?" — Curtailling Contributions instead of Expenses. — Some give only when cannot help it. — The Mite. — The small Gift, rich Entertainment, and splendid House. — The selfish Christian praying, "Thy Kingdom come." — Giving a Test of Piety. — The burning Turf. — The Soldier. — Who is benevolent? — Get to give.

WILL the world be converted? It seems too late in the day to propound such an interrogation. With the promises of the word of God to encourage such a belief, and the rapid advancement of the gospel in the last half century, it may appear quite a needless inquiry to make. Yet, judging from the reluctant response which is given to calls of charity, and the

penurious spirit that still pervades the church of Christ, it seems as if the mass of Christian professors had yet to learn that the world will be converted. The marked delinquencies that exist among the people of God, in regard to the wants of perishing millions, is not consistent with a full belief that the gospel will be preached to every creature. A few only seem to catch the inspiration of the promise that gives the heathen to Christ for his inheritance, and accordingly graduate their interest and contributions. By the great body of the church the missionary enterprise is not appreciated. As the agency ordained by God for the salvation of a lost world, it is undervalued. The mass of Christian people do not feel the obligation to sustain it as they do to sustain other religious institutions. Their prayers for its success and triumph are strangely infrequent; and their gifts are as stingy as their prayers. "The scanty rills of charity which at present water the garden of the Lord, and the ingenuity and effort employed to bring them there, compared with the almost undiminished tide of selfish expenditure which still holds on its original course, remind one of the slender rivulets which the inhabitants of the East raise from a river, by mechanical force, to irrigate their thirsty gardens; the mighty current, meanwhile, without exhibiting any sensible diminution of its waters, sweeping on in its ample and ancient bed to the

ocean."* A greater sin does not mar the reputation of the church at the present day than that of *penurious giving*. The car of salvation is impeded by the covetous spirit that prevails more than by the downright opposition of the heathen world. Religion languishes in the church because of the lack of benevolence among professing Christians more than from the abounding of hostility among the enemies of God; for it is always true that generous giving leaves *more than half* the blessing at home, while it conveys a noble spiritual largess abroad, as is plainly taught by the words, "It is *more blessed* to give than to receive." This divine declaration is professedly believed by all the children of God; but, alas! how few seek to verify it by personal experiment! To how many is it a profound riddle, awakening little curiosity to effect its solution! By the liberal and even lavish expenditure that is made for external decorations, appetite, comfort, and fashion, it seems as if multitudes of Christ's flock disbelieved it, and were fully set upon proving it a lie. *Self* is the idol before which many of the Lord's followers bow with their costliest offerings. "Self is Dives in the mansion, clothed in purple, and faring sumptuously every day. The cause of Christ is Lazarus, lying at his gate, and fed only with the crumbs which fall from his table."†

* Mammon, p. 202.

† Ibid., p. 52.

We profess to believe that all our possessions belong to Christ — talents, time, influence, wealth, all. We acknowledge ourselves to be the stewards of God, obligated to dispense his bounties according to his direction; and yet we employ them with little regard to the pressing wants of the needy or the demands of our Master. The superscription which we profess to stamp upon every coin is Christ's, and still we use them as if they bore the image and superscription of Cæsar. With a small part of the cheerfulness with which Christ surrendered life itself for the souls of men, we part with our dollars and shillings for the same object. Contrasted with his willingness in pouring out his precious *blood* for a world lying in wickedness, how miserably poor and meagre are our reluctant offerings to his cause! When we contemplate his benevolent acts from the manger to the cross, it seems as if no language of rebuke were too severe to chastise us for our selfish policy.

It is true that the contributions to the various benevolent societies amount to a much larger sum at the present than at any former period. Here and there a man of wealth is exceedingly munificent in his donations; and some of moderate possessions, and even in straitened circumstances, are liberal in the gifts which they cast into the Lord's treasury; but the increase of benevolence is not proportioned to the increase of wealth. The *self-denial* that was

practised thirty years ago, in the comparatively small collections then made, was equal, if, indeed, it did not exceed, the self-denial incident to the larger contributions of the present day. There are those in the Christian church who pay more annually for cigars and the noxious weed than they contribute to benevolent objects. There are many more who expend a larger sum in a single pleasure excursion than they give in three or even five years to the poor and perishing. The writer recently learned this fact. A Christian young man, connected with an extensive mercantile house in the city of Boston, where he received a large salary, spent his last summer's vacation in an excursion to a popular watering-place. Some weeks after his return, one of his fellow-clerks, whose benevolence was well known, called upon him for a contribution in behalf of a poor, suffering woman, with whose condition he had become acquainted. The young man declined giving, assigning as the reason, "*My excursion in the summer cost me seventy-five dollars.*" It is a fair illustration of a large class of inconsistent professors, who cheat God out of his rightful possessions in order to forego self-denial and pander to the love of pleasure.

It is said that the entire contribution of the churches connected with the A. B. C. F. M. amounts to no more than *one fourth of a cent* daily for each member. What a mere pittance in contrast with the wealth in the possession of professing Christians! ONE

FOURTH OF A CENT DAILY ! far less than the amount *wasted* in the religious families of the land. From the superfluities of Christian people might be spared a sum vastly greater than this, without diminishing their enjoyments, or being accounted in any sense a loss. ONE FOURTH OF A CENT DAILY ! What a vindication of the charge we bring against the church of Christ ! what a stain upon the Christian name ! what a caricature upon the Christian profession, that all our wealth belongs to Christ ! Is there self-denial in this stinted benevolence beyond that practised in the days of our fathers ? Nay, is there any sacrifice in such meagre offerings that deserves to be called self-denial ? There is only one reply to such interrogatives — only one opinion of such a fact can be entertained. It is a dishonor to the cause of Christ ; it is a sin of no ordinary degree ; it can be washed away only by tears of penitence and a larger charity.

A pious gentleman, who had accumulated much property in a successful business, was asked by a clergyman if he had not amassed enough for his family, so that he might retire from business. "O," he replied, "I have not yet made enough to give each of my children a single leaf of the catechism." "Why," inquired the minister, "how large is your family ?" "About six hundred millions," was his reply. It is the lack of such a spirit as this of which the church is guilty. The members of Christ's flock

who take this kindly view of a perishing world are few in number, and all the actual self-denial of the present age is practised by that few ; so that we insist that self-denial was never rarer than at present.

That the church at the present day is as delinquent in regard to the missionary enterprise as has been alleged, may appear from the following specifications, to the truth of which every reader will attest.

Few realize that God requires giving for their own good. He might have so provided for the human family that all their wants would have been supplied without the aid of charity ; but he saw that it was best for all to have the poor always with them ; for, in blessing them, the benefactors are especially blessed. It is said of a traveller upon the Alps, that, while chilled well nigh to freezing by the excessive cold, his companion sunk down in the snow by his side, unable longer to resist the keenness of the winter's blast. At once he began to rub his limbs and body, in order to restore their warmth and save the exhausted man from death, and the effort of resuscitating his fallen companion brought back the heat to his own system ; so that, while he restored his associate, he saved his own life. It is an illustration of God's plan to cultivate the spirituality of his children. While they bear spiritual life, by self-denying efforts, to the lost, they are making rapid advancement in the divine life themselves. In saving others, they save themselves ; yet few regard the

matter in this light. They are far from viewing this part of a Christian's duty as a necessary and valuable discipline. The whole system of benevolence is, to the mass, rather an *evil* incident to the present condition of the world. They submit to it as they do to disappointments and chronic pains, unavoidable and painful parts of human experience, endured, though unwelcome. "So many calls; so much to be given; what are we coming to? more and more every year; what a burden!" These are the imbodiment of thoughts which occupy the minds of multitudes, instead of that more delightful view, that clothes every call for aid in the robes of an angel helper. The Christian who has proper views of God's plan of benevolence will hail every new opening in the moral wilderness as a fresh opportunity for him to improve his already shining graces; and the feeble church, with such a view of the missionary enterprise, will not ask to be excused from giving, because the benevolent act will be attended with advancement in holiness, even though her proper proportion be only a mite. Her members will delight to bring their *little* from their lot of poverty for the sake of the resulting holiness. A single dollar may be the extent of their ability, and the contribution will be attended with as great a spiritual blessing as the just and larger gift of a more wealthy church. The truth is sufficient to silence forever

the oft-reiterated excuse of feeble churches, "*Too poor to give.*" *

There is little system in giving. Very few Christians sit down to settle the question, how much they can possibly contribute annually, nor how that annual amount shall be distributed. A few only make any provision beforehand for the demands of charity. They may give, and that, too, with quite a liberal hand; but they decide only upon the emergency of the case. If they are flushed with money at the time the appeal is made, their gifts may be very generous. If their purses are lean, the fact is proclaimed by their stinted contribution. In this way much is lost to the missionary enterprise; for system only insures such economy as will lay in store liberal sums for the Lord.

What we mean by systematic giving may be learned from the following facts. Rev. Dr. Hammond and Lord Chief Justice Hale, not to mention others, were wont to contribute *one tenth* part of their annual income to benevolent societies. Baxter observed this rule until he was impressed that duty required of him larger contributions; and he observed of the rule, "I think, however, that it is as likely a proportion as can be prescribed, and that

* After the Hindoos have gathered the harvest and threshed the grain, before removing it to the market or granary, they take out the portion for their god. Whether poor, or in debt, or however small the crop may be, the god's portion is first given.

devoting a *tenth* part, ordinarily, to God, is a matter that we have more than human direction for." Doddridge said, "I make a solemn dedication of *one tenth* of my estate, salary and income, to charitable uses. I also devote to such uses an *eighth* of every thing I receive by way of gift or present." Dr. Watts gave a *fifth* part of his income; the wife of Rev. Dr. Bury gave a *fourth* part. Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe said, "I consecrate *half* of my yearly income to charitable purposes; yea, all that I have beyond the bare conveniences and necessities of life shall surely be the Lord's." Also, Hon. Robert Boyle and Rev. Mr. Brand devoted *half* of their annual income to objects of benevolence.

A shoemaker of New Jersey, distinguished for his generous donations to the different benevolent societies, replied to the inquiry, how he managed to give so much, "I earn, one day with another, about a dollar a day; and I can, without inconvenience to myself or family, lay by five cents of this sum for charitable purposes; the amount is thirty cents a week. My wife takes in sewing and washing, and earns something like two dollars a week; and she lays by ten cents of that. My children, each of them, earn a shilling or two, and are glad to contribute their penny; so that, altogether, we *lay by us in store* forty cents a week; and if we have been unusually prosperous, we contribute something more. The weekly amount is deposited every Sabbath morning

in a box kept for that purpose, and reserved for future use. Thus, by these small earnings, we have learned that it is more blessed to give than to receive. The yearly amount saved in this way is about *twenty-five dollars*; and I distribute this among the various benevolent societies according to the best of my judgment."

Such examples illustrate what we mean by *systematic* benevolence. They are a fulfilment of the divine commandment: "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him."* The injunction is supposed to enforce the duty of setting apart every Sabbath, or at other *stated* periods, a portion of one's income for benevolent objects. Since every one might not be able to judge weekly of his prosperity, the injunction is not believed to confine the setting apart of a definite portion to the *first day of the week*, but is rather designed to teach the duty of doing it at some time *statedly*; in other words, to observe some rule and time of systematic giving. It is such benevolence as this that we assert to be *rare*. It is wholly because of its rarity that such examples as the above are considered worthy of record and comment in news sheets and printed volumes. The persons in the land who actually regard *the scriptural rule of periodical giving* are scarcely more than one

* 1 Cor. xvi. 2.

to a church. A very few churches only, as a body, have adopted any system like the following, which is observed by a church in Philadelphia. The card below is given to each member, and he is requested to designate which of the columns he will adopt as his rate of giving to the objects named in it, and then return it to the officers of the church.

<i>Rates of contributions to the following objects:</i>	No. 1.	No. 2.	No. 3.	No. 4.	No. 5.	No. 6.
Foreign Missions,	0.01	0.02	0.04	0.12 $\frac{1}{2}$	0.16 $\frac{2}{3}$	0.25
Domestic Missions,	0.01	0.02	0.04	0.12 $\frac{1}{2}$	0.16 $\frac{2}{3}$	0.25
Board of Publication,	0.01	0.02	0.04	0.12 $\frac{1}{2}$	0.16 $\frac{2}{3}$	0.25
Board of Education,	0.01	0.02	0.04	0.12 $\frac{1}{2}$	0.16 $\frac{2}{3}$	0.25
Sabbath School,	0.01	0.02	0.04	0.12 $\frac{1}{2}$	0.16 $\frac{2}{3}$	0.25
Bible and Tract Soc.	0.01	0.02	0.04	0.12 $\frac{1}{2}$	0.16 $\frac{2}{3}$	0.25
Total per week,	6	12	24	75	1.00	1.50

"On considering the above rates, I agree to give the sums specified in rate No. —, and request the collector to call for it every (month or quarter, as the case may be.)" Whatever may be the lesson of the Scriptures to the churches concerning such form of benevolent action, it is yet to be learned by the most of them.*

Christians wait to give. The want of system in their benefactions leads to *waiting*. How few would give at all unless called upon by the collector or solicited to give in the house of God! How few lay by their contributions and carry them stately to the

* See Appendix, L.

Lord's treasury! The mass, I repeat, wait until the agent appears to awaken their sympathies by his eloquent appeals; and this is their only acknowledged announcement to prepare to contribute. Such believers need to ponder the injunction of Paul to the Corinthians. When he was making collections for the distressed brethren at Jerusalem, he instructed them, as we have seen, to lay by their contributions on the first day of the week, adding, "*That there be no gatherings when I come.*" He would have them so principled in giving that they would be prepared with a gift previously laid by, and not wait to be driven to their duty by a pungent sermon. The counsel was never more needed than at present.

Some Christian professors exhibit a strange opposition to agents. They had rather hear any sort of a preacher than a "*beggar,*" and listen to any sermon with more interest than to one on charity. Perhaps, when an agent is to occupy the desk, they find it inconvenient to attend public worship. At any rate, such a Sabbath is rather *borne* or *suffered* than enjoyed. Perhaps such professing Christians have never reflected that the existence of just such church members as themselves has made the appointment of agents necessary. Gladly would the officers of our benevolent societies dispense with all agents, and depend upon the churches to forward their contributions collected according to the system before considered. It would spare much painstaking and

expense. But then they cannot trust to the generosity and promptitude of the churches in this regard. There are so many persons, even with the vows of God upon them, belonging to the class named, that the present system of agency is indispensable. The individuals who dislike to see an agent are those who seldom give unless it be under the influence of his warm appeals, and then only just enough to preserve caste with the company of givers. Until the churches universally attain to a higher standard of benevolence, and systematize their giving, it will be impossible to dispense with the present plan of agency. Such complaints as the above against the employment of agents fall with a poor grace from the lips of those who would give little or nothing without them.

Ingenuity and much effort is necessary to obtain a liberal contribution from many. The fact that the officers of our benevolent societies are obliged to select for agents those preachers who are most happy in addressing themselves to the hearts of their hearers, is a poor compliment to the benevolence of Christian people, and vindicates the justness of the criticisms contained in this chapter. One would suppose that their belief in God's willingness and design to convert the world through the agency of his church would be sufficient to enlist their individual interest without such stirring appeals; but it is not. And after such an agent is in the field, he

must display his ingenuity and tact in obtaining even small contributions from a large class of professors of religion. In every church there are some to whom we cannot appeal successfully for aid in the work of missions without previous study and contrivance. They can be reached only at certain points and at certain times. They must be labored with, as if the matter of their giving were actually a questionable duty.

Some complain because there are so many calls for aid. God opens new doors for usefulness on every hand, thus encouraging his children to toil for the salvation of the world ; and this class of his professed children complain because he asks them to coöperate with him in multiplying the triumphs of his grace. The complaint shows that a cloud of ignorance is veiling the spiritual vision of such professors in relation to personal obligation in the work of redeeming the race. They have yet to learn a rudimental principle of the Christian faith. Rather than be aggrieved at so many and so pressing calls for money, they ought to rejoice that Providence is so fast heralding the conversion of the world. They should regard it as the promise of gospel triumphs in lands of darkness—the morning star upon the brow of refulgent day. Knowing that God requires no gift beyond their actual ability, they should hail these increasing calls as the harbingers of peace and salvation to the lost of every nation. To utter the lan-

guage of complaint at their multiplicity is no other than barefaced reflection upon God's rapid way of bringing the lost sheep of the house of Israel into his kingdom. It is virtually saying, "Would that the gospel might advance at a slower pace over the earth! Would that God had not opened so many effectual doors of usefulness for his children to enter!" We refer this class of disciples to the noble example of Alexander the Great, who, on one occasion, directed the philosopher Anaxarchus to go to his treasurer and ask for any amount he pleased. The treasurer refused to grant his request, because it was so exorbitant, until he had consulted his prince. Accordingly, he went to him and said, "It seemed too much for one man to receive." The great sovereign replied, "It is not too much for Alexander to give. *He does honor to my liberality* by so large a request."

Others defend their want of liberality by using the unchristian proverb, "*Charity begins at home.*" The poor of their own community, the morally destitute of their own land, and, possibly, the demands of their own persons and family, are offered as reasons for withholding from the great missionary enterprise. It is not denied that these may sometimes be good reasons; but they are usually presented as mere excuses. "Charity begins at home!" As if the proverb were a vindication of the most self-denying benevolence, when it is nothing more

than the miserable sophistry of a selfish heart. *Selfishness* begins at home; and it is this which is often palmed upon the world for a kind of home charity. The man who refuses a contribution for the heathen world because he beholds needy ones in his own neighborhood is not usually distinguished for his generosity to them. "It is absurd," said a penurious Christian professor belonging to this class, "to be sending money abroad, to be spent we know not how, when there is so much suffering nearer home." "I will give five pounds to the poor at home if you will give the same," said the Christian to whom the above remark was made. "I did not mean that," replied the illiberal man; "but if you must go from home, why go so far? Think of the miserable poor of Ireland." "I will give five pounds to the poor of Ireland if you will give the same." "I do not mean that, either," was the reply; a very fair illustration of the real spirit of such professing Christians as seek to hide their sins under the mantle, "Charity begins at home."

There are other excuses offered by some members of the church who give to the Lord with parsimonious hand. They have found, in ransacking the world, a few cases of imposture practised on the generous hearted, and, possibly, an isolated instance of the unwise or unfaithful disbursement of charitable funds; and these they employ as arguments against all charity thereafter. Surely God has

rested the obligation of his people to contribute upon a very uncertain basis if the delinquencies of one or more will excuse the multitude from performing benevolent deeds. Surely, too, there must be a singular want of benevolence in the heart of that professor who presumes to defend his illiberality by such an unreasonable excuse. And again: the plea is even set up, "*We do not know that the money reaches the heathen.*" Base as is such an aspersion upon the characters of the most devoted Christians which the church affords, it is, nevertheless, uttered by some believers. They know, or have the means of knowing, that the most reputable and pious Christians in the land are selected to preside over the counsels of our benevolent institutions. They know, moreover, that a large body of Christian ministers and laymen, of similar integrity and holiness, are appointed as inspectors of the disbursement of funds, and that a full account of the expenditures is annually given to the world. To make such a declaration as the above, in the face of these facts, is evidence of no small degree of ignorance or recklessness. A similar reflection cast upon the character of a neighbor, in relation to some matter of business, would expose one to a legal prosecution. What, then, shall we say of it when it is uttered in regard to a business which is under the supervision of the best and most honored Christians of the land? We cannot censure the utterance of a statement so reck-

less in language too severe ; for Christians of the present day ought to possess knowledge and piety enough to know and feel that it is a base slander.

Others still cry, with the disciples over the alabaster box, "*To what purpose is this waste ?*" "How many thousands of dollars are expended, and with what feeble results ! How many precious lives are sacrificed, and how few are converted ! What an outlay of strength, and hardship, and suffering, even to enter a land of moral darkness ! Do the results pay for such sacrifices and expenditures ? Are we warranted in making such contributions of treasure and life for the spiritual returns we receive ?" Such unbelieving souls may be referred, for a curative, to the address of Christ to the disciples who first raised the inquiry, "*To what purpose is this waste ?*" "Why trouble ye the woman ? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. * * * Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her."

Many, in a season of pressure, *curtail their contributions instead of their expenses*. It is very common for even religious men to increase their expenses, as their wealth multiplies, without adding a farthing to their previous gifts to the missionary cause. Very few in our churches adopt the benevolent policy of Rev. John Wesley in this particular. When his income was thirty pounds a year, he lived on twen-

ty-eight pounds, and gave away two. The next year his income was sixty pounds; and still he lived on twenty-eight pounds, and gave away thirty-two. The fourth year raised his income to one hundred and twenty pounds; and he still adhered to his plan, and contributed ninety-two pounds. It is a noble example of economical living in order to multiply benevolent giving. The principle involved in it is the only one that can bear the test of eternal truth; and yet how generally does the policy prevail, to curtail contributions, and not expenses, in seasons of pecuniary embarrassment, and to increase family outlays, and not subscriptions, in seasons of prosperity!

The delinquency of some in relation to the missionary enterprise can be stated in no better language than this — *they give only when they cannot help it*. The presentation of the object by a person whom they particularly respect, or the presence of another of similar character, may insure a reluctant offering. They may be placed in such circumstances that denial will tarnish their honor, or a sense of shame overcome their penurious spirit; and then a gift may be *extorted*. But, generally, they regard themselves peculiarly fortunate if absent from the sanctuary when the missionary box goes round, or if they are passed by when the collectors canvass the parish. Their gifts are the spoils of *necessity*.

A class of professing Christians are ever discour-

ing about contributing their *mite* ; and, sure enough, it is but a *mite* in comparison with their abundance. Doubtless, in so saying, they design to show that they follow the example of the liberal widow of whom the sacred writer informs us ; but they were never more mistaken than they are in this instance ; for the widow's *mite* was the last pittance that she possessed, and surely she could give no more than her *all*.* But *they* bring their *mites* from a generous competency ; thus deluding themselves with the idea of being benevolent, when their very offerings expose their selfishness. Scores of the professed followers of Christ are perverting the poor widow's excellent example to their dishonor, and contenting themselves with a degree of benevolence of which they would be ashamed if the delusion were wholly removed.

There are certain marked *inconsistencies* in Christian conduct, relative to benevolence, beyond what have already been exposed. They appear in the following facts. A believer, of excellent religious character in almost every particular, declined contributing to a benevolent object because *he could not afford it*. Scarcely a week passed by before he entertained a social gathering at his house with a

* The late missionary, Rev. Daniel Temple, once said, at a meeting of the A. B. C. F. M., the poor widow's gift is not to be estimated so much by what she gave as by what **SHE HAD LEFT**.

variety of viands, at an expense, probably, of not less than *ten* dollars. Another contributed twenty-five cents to a worthy object, and, doubtless, wished that he had more to give. On the following evening he spread a banquet for a large company of invited guests, at an expense of, at least, *fifteen* dollars. An agent called upon a wealthy Christian for aid; but he refused to contribute, on the ground that his present outlays were so large that he could not afford it. And what were his outlays? He was building a splendid house, at an expense of *seventy thousand dollars*, including the preparation and adornment of grounds. By dint of perseverance, however, the agent induced him to give *one dollar*.* These facts involve the grossest inconsistencies, and are an illustration of a class belonging to the same category. They need no comment to expose their marked impropriety.

How often does even the penurious disciple of Christ offer the prayer, "*Thy kingdom come*"! Even he who is chargeable with one or more of the foregoing delinquencies scarcely closes a supplication without uttering this request, "*Thy kingdom come*"! And yet, when the evidence of its coming is unmistakable in the pleadings of benighted nations, and the increasing doors of usefulness opened here and

* The author received this latter fact from the lips of the agent himself.

there, he finds a score of reasons for withholding aid, and even *complains* that there are so many calls for almsgiving. With his lips he prays that the gospel may multiply its triumphs ; but his hands refuse to labor for it, or, at least, he gives so sparingly that the Savior's kingdom would tardily come if all the church should follow his example. His prayer is a standing rebuke to his benevolence, or rather to the want of it. There is no consistency at all between a person's benevolence and the utterance of this petition unless he contributes to the extent of his ability, and, with the spirit of the devoted Mr. H——, *thanks the collector for the opportunity of giving*. The prayer supposes that the suppliant is ready and willing to coöperate, in every possible way, to spread the gospel abroad.

In view of such delinquencies, there is but one conclusion to which we arrive ; viz., *the church falls far below the true standard of Christian benevolence in responding to the calls of a perishing world*. There is needed more of the spirit of the divine Redeemer in order to beget more self-denial and generous giving. A nearer view of the cross and its painful antecedents is necessary to insure a more perfect imitation of the example of Him *who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor*. We must see and feel, as never before, that benevolence is the prime test and condition of acceptance with God ; that it is only in

the discharge of this consistent duty that we can keep the fire burning upon the altar of our hearts.

During the spread of the cholera in Ireland in 1832, a priest is said to have devised the following expedient to allay the fears of the people. Some burning turf was exhibited on a public occasion, said to have been lighted by fire from heaven. It was distributed among the people, with the instruction that they must convey it to their homes, and with it kindle the fire upon their own hearths: all, at the same time, were assured, that, so long as the fire was kept burning, the pestilence would not enter their dwellings. There was this condition, however, that, after kindling the fire upon his own hearth, each one should bear a piece of the flaming turf to his neighbor. By this means it was soon spread from house to house over the entire country. So God has given his precious gospel to us as our safeguard against a dreadful moral malady, with the assurance that its holy fire will continue to burn upon our altars, provided we bear a spark of it abroad to our perishing neighbors. The important *condition* needs to be pondered, that our self-denying acts may attest our appreciation of the immortal interests at stake.

A Christian traveller relates that he attended upon the service of a Protestant church, on Easter Sunday, in the city of Lyons. After the celebration of the Lord's supper, many of the members advanced

forward to the minister and laid down their offerings to aid in the erection of a sanctuary. Among the number was a soldier, who, with gushing tears of gratitude, presented *all his earnings for the last three months*. The minister, knowing this circumstance, and fearing that he might have given more than he could afford, asked him if he were certain he could spare so much. With much emotion, he replied, "My Savior *spared* not himself, but freely gave his life for my redemption; and surely *I can spare* one quarter of my year's earnings for the promotion of his glory here on the earth." This is the spirit which is needed to meet the demands of the present age in behalf of benighted millions pleading for the gospel. If one half the church were ready to make such sacrifices, how speedily would the gospel advance over the earth! what companies of faithful missionaries would go forth to reap the moral harvest of the world! what a full and overflowing treasury would be the Lord's!

Here let the Christian professor pause and learn what it is to be BENEVOLENT. Let him not delude himself with the idea of possessing this virtue when he has no claim to it in the sight of God. He is not benevolent who measures his contributions with parsimonious hand and gives grudgingly to objects of charity; nor is he benevolent who contributes to a cause because he is ashamed to refuse, no matter if his gift be large; nor he who does not economize in order

to swell his contributions, and say, with Cæsar, "No music is so charming to my ears as the supplications of those in want of my assistance." He alone is benevolent who watches for opportunities to do good, gives all he can by the practice of self-denial and economy, and studies how and when he can give in most liberal measure. This only is copying the benevolence of Christ and that of the primitive saints, and living according to the plain injunctions of revealed truth.

GET TO GIVE! This should be the motto of the Christian church, to contrast nobly with that of the selfish world, GET TO HOARD! God is to be glorified with her alms as really as with her prayers. Both together are to be accounted as a memorial of her fidelity by Him who looks upon the heart. The worldling may accumulate wealth for his own pleasure; but the Christian has a very erroneous view of his relations to Christ and his cause if he does not perceive that duty requires him to use his gains for the glory of God. No policy is consistent with a Christian profession excepting this of *getting to give*; and, sooner or later, the believer will see it to be thus, and will exclaim, with the eloquent Antony, "I have lost all except what I have given away." The sweetest consolation ever yielded by a fortune to the dying believer was enjoyed by him who, to the inquiry, "Where may your fortune be found?" replied, "In the pockets of the indigent."

CHAPTER X.

MUTUAL CHRISTIAN FAITHFULNESS.

The Bible View. — How disregarded, and why. — Lack of moral Courage. — Fear of giving Offence. — Little Interest in spiritual Welfare of Church. — Benefits of this Fidelity. — Inspires Confidence in the faithful Disciple. — Begets Watchfulness. — Spares the Church much unpleasant Discipline. — Preserves Purity of Church, and gives Power over Men. — Spirit that ought to pervade the Church on this Subject. — A faithful Friend.

“MOREOVER, IF THY BROTHER SHALL TRESPASS AGAINST THEE, GO AND TELL HIM HIS FAULT BETWEEN THEE AND HIM ALONE : IF HE SHALL HEAR THEE, THOU HAST GAINED THY BROTHER. BUT IF HE WILL NOT HEAR THEE, THEN TAKE WITH THEE ONE OR TWO MORE, THAT IN THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY WORD MAY BE ESTABLISHED. AND IF HE SHALL NEGLECT TO HEAR THEM, TELL IT UNTO THE CHURCH ; BUT IF HE NEGLECT TO HEAR THE CHURCH, LET HIM BE UNTO THEE AS AN HEATHEN MAN AND A PUBLICAN.” * The above commandment has reference to alienations among the brethren of a Christian

* Matt. xviii. 15-17.

church, and points out the duty of the injured towards the offending party. It plainly instructs that the aggrieved member should unbosom his charges to the erring brother or sister first of all. This he must do ere he spreads his grievances before another member of the church, and, of course, before he *tells them to the church* itself. Every person who is received to the full communion of a church engages to submit to such fidelity on the part of others, and to live in the practice of it himself. Yet how seldom is the divine requirement, in this regard, fulfilled! How few complainants bring their charges *first* to the door of the offender! How ready is human nature to proclaim them abroad before regarding the injunction, "*Go and tell him his fault*"! Frequently the whole community is in a turmoil about a brother's offences before a single admonition or rebuke is administered to him. The whole matter is discussed over and over, in the church and out of it, by believers and unbelievers, before the accused is waited upon at all. Opinions are formed concerning his innocence or guilt, and judgment is passed upon him, while yet he is ignorant of the progress of his virtual, though informal, trial. Still, Christians generally perceive the duty herein enjoined, and are seldom disposed to deny it. They may be patterns of godliness in every other particular, yet fail in this duty of mutual Christian faithfulness; thus allowing unchristian conduct to mar the reputation of the church,

and erring brethren wax worse and worse, unchecked in their career by one faithful warning or rebuke.

The following reasons influence the church member to neglect the foregoing command. *Lack of moral courage.* It requires a good degree of fortitude to bear a charge directly to an offending brother or sister. He who has never been brought to the experience can scarcely appreciate the trial. We may possess courage to enroll ourselves in the van of opposition to a desolating vice ; we may care little for the frowns of the rich and influential, and persevere in prosecuting a philanthropic enterprise, even in the face of violent hostility ; and yet we may not possess sufficient fortitude to go and tell a Christian brother his fault. Many a man who might become a general on the tented field finds that his heart fails him here. To meet a man face to face, either to warn or rebuke, and say, "Thou art the man — your error is thus and thus — your guilt is so and so," it is a great cross for the most devoted Christian to take up. He may not falter in discussing the delinquency before the whole church, in assembly, or before an ecclesiastical council ; but to press it home to the conscience of the accused himself, this demands quite a different temper of mind and heart.

Possibly there may be those in the church who experience none of this diffidence in admonishing or rebuking others ; but most of the followers of Christ

have enough of this natural timidity to render this kind of Christian fidelity a trying duty to perform.

The fear of giving offence may be another reason. It must be admitted that erring professors of religion are too generally disposed to resent such acts of Christian faithfulness. It is not usually true, however, of holy men and women, whose error is one of judgment. A sincere, humble, devoted Christian, suspected of evil, though innocent, will receive the charge with becoming humility. He appreciates the duties that devolve upon members of the same church in respect to mutual faithfulness, and he can but honor the piety of that brother who comes in a Christian spirit to tell him of his fault. But when a disciple of Christ is guilty of an offence, yet unrepentant, he is likely to resent an honest effort to restore him. And perhaps the *experience* of some of the faithful ones in this matter may have given rise to much of this fear of giving offence; for it is sometimes true, that not only the erring members themselves oppose the efforts to reclaim them, but a circle of their sympathizing friends become indignant. As a consequence, two clashing parties spring into existence, each striving earnestly for the mastery. Here church difficulties often originate; here pastors, in the faithful discharge of duty, often make their bitterest foes; and a long train of evils, too painful to describe, is the result. Because of this, many may not consider it worth the while to attempt

to restrain and save a member of the church from downright apostasy. The fear of giving offence may be magnified by this train of evils; and hence a large portion of the members of the church may think it better, on the whole, that one or more delinquents be allowed to wound Christ in the house of his friends than that the peace and harmony of their society be jeopardized by discipline.

So it is in relation to the less important personal difficulties among the brethren of a church. It is trying to a Christian to know that he has even one enemy in the church, to perceive that there is one man or woman who passes him in the street with unkind look and unloving heart. And hence, to hazard the friendly Christian intercourse that now subsists between himself and another member of the church, by going privately to tell him of his fault, is an issue which he would often study to avoid.

Christians may neglect the duty in question *because they have little interest in the spiritual welfare of the church or of the erring member himself.* They ought to indulge such concern for the character of the church as to desire to see every stain wiped away and every member alive in Christ; but if they can associate and walk with those who are a reproach to the cause of Christ and a stone of stumbling to an ungodly world, and yet have no special interest for their moral recovery, then they possess too little interest to admonish them concerning a

fault. There is far less excuse for shrinking from this mutual Christian fidelity because of a want of interest than there is on the ground of natural timidity or fear of giving offence; for such non-interest reveals a torpid state of the heart at once alarming and wicked. He who loves the gates of Zion, and can say of her as the weeping Jew, by the stream of Babylon, said of his native city, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy," feels every injury that is done to her cause. For her own sake he would see her purity preserved, and her name the representative of all that is true and good. He has interest enough in her welfare to admonish and reprove his nearest and dearest friend.

Such are some of the causes which lead to the neglect of this duty of mutual Christian faithfulness, and they may serve to show what a trying cross is connected with its performance. The following BENEFITS will result from the faithful discharge of this duty.

Confidence is reposed in the Christian who is thus faithful. To other members of the church it is evidence of sincere devotion to the common cause of religion. All love to witness such tender interest in the spiritual welfare of a fellow-disciple. It presents

a pleasing-contrast with the too common practice of publishing the faults of erring brethren, first of all, to the world. To the person reproved, if ever converted, it becomes evidence of deep interest in his spiritual prosperity on the part of the reprovee. It is a sort of guaranty that he has not been abroad through the neighborhood to extemporize upon his errors. True, as we have said before, if the person is self-deceived, or a hypocrite, his confidence will not be won ; resentment may repel the honest effort to do him good ; but all whose hearts have been regenerated, and whose spirit is truly Christian, will repose more confidence in one so faithful than they can in those who stand aloof and speak freely of their faults only to others.

Where such fidelity abounds in a church, *all the members will be more watchful over themselves.* The fact that men are surrounded with witnesses, beholding the good and evil of their lives, often subjects them to powerful restraints. This is true of nearly all persons and in all professions. The efforts of vicious men to elude the gaze of the world in the perpetration of evil, plunging fearfully into sin when persuaded that concealment is possible, shows what a powerful restraint is here imposed. Only impress upon the mind of a devotee of vice that some eye will behold him as he takes upon his soul the guilt of another sin, and in many instances it will

prove effectual. It is when the youth or young man supposes the eye of a faithful friend is turned away that he summons courage to tamper with vice.

A kindred feeling pervades the hearts of professing Christians ; nor is it a low and sinful sentiment. It may be an *inferior* motive by which to be influenced ; but it is not unchristian. It is proper for the most devoted child of God to be moved by such a motive. It is one of the guards which a wise Providence set in human nature to save it from moral obloquy and ruin. Paul exhorted the Hebrews to run the race with patience, because they were "*compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses.*" He had allusion to the ancient games, when a vast multitude occupied the circular seats in the amphitheatre to behold the striving combatants ; and although the "*witnesses*" to whom he doubtless pointed were the ransomed in the skies, yet I know not that it is more proper to be moved to duty by the consideration that we are a spectacle to heaven than by the more apparent truth that we are a spectacle to earth. True, this must not be the *only* nor the *highest* motive to Christian faithfulness ; but it may have its place among the variety of motives which ought to stimulate the follower of Christ to earnestness in the cause which he has espoused.

Now, mark it where you may, the church which is lax in discipline, allowing its members to multiply trespasses unreprieved, waxes worse and worse, until

it has scarcely a name to live. On the other hand, when the people of God are faithful to regard the scriptural policy in dealing with offending members of the church, then a good degree of purity will pervade their ranks, and prosperity attend the cause they love. In this single fact do we not find evidence enough that such Christian faithfulness generally increases personal watchfulness ?

This mutual Christian faithfulness *saves the church much unpleasant discipline*. Many cases of delinquency, which might be corrected by timely Christian admonition, ripen into disgraceful apostasy if allowed to pass unnoticed. The erring member usually commences a backsliding career with little sins. He enters the apostate's path at this fatal corner. Not yet does the heart burn with direful lusts ; not yet is recovery impossible. Here let the faithful Christian take him kindly by the hand, pointing him to the only path of honor and safety, and he may spare the church long seasons of trouble, and save the delinquent from grosser sins and final excommunication. The destruction of the choking tare, as it shoots from the soil, will prevent a wider ruin from its ripened and scattered seeds. A single spire of whiteweed will sow a farm in half a score of years ; so one transgression, unrebuked, speedily multiplies to more than sixty or a hundred fold ; for it is true in the moral world that sins usually multiply faster than charities. On the contrary, a kind,

Christian, personal appeal and remonstrance may nip transgression in the bud, and prevent many a case of severe and painful discipline. Hence the church that would avoid future trials in the discipline of offending members must be careful to note the beginnings of sin. They must not wait until the offence has grown into monstrous boldness and become a "hissing and by-word" among ungodly men; for then the die is cast—the stain is fixed—the influence is impaired—the common cause is suffering. Then the popular prejudice is awakened—the finger of scorn is raised—the taunting satire of the world is spoken. The saving effort must be made, and the pressing Christian duty performed, before the offence becomes a public disgrace. This is both a labor-saving and a trial-saving operation. "An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure."

I remark again, what has been all along implied, or indirectly taught, *that it is only by this mutual fidelity that the church is continued pure, and thus enabled to accomplish the object of its organization.* The purer a church, the greater its power; the holier its influence, the richer its trophies. Unconverted men are generally ready to repose a degree of confidence in it just in proportion to its purity. They lose confidence in it, and pour upon it their denunciations, when inconsistencies and open sins mar the conduct of its members. When difficulties destroy its harmony, when one member is arrayed against



another, when there is alienation and unseemly altercations among its members, — at such a time, especially, the world holds it in derision, and says, “What doest thou more than others?” Then Christian influence wanes, the ordinances of religion lose their power, and all the blessings of the Spirit are withholden.

Upon this subject an eloquent writer remarks, “The church of Christ will have power over men just in proportion to the glory of that earnest of her inheritance which she has in present possession. Just so much of the Spirit of Heaven as she now possesses — just so much of the joy of God’s salvation as belongs to her — just so much as she can show, prove, demonstrate, of a revelation of the things that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, which God hath prepared for those that love him — just so many more souls will she be capable of drawing to her Savior.” This is the burden of David’s prayer: “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me by thy free Spirit; then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.” That is, aid me to walk in purity and holiness; then shall I have power over sinful men to win them to Christ.

How shall the purity of the church be preserved unless this mutual fidelity distinguishes its members? Will not errors and sins creep into its sacred

enclosure, and blast many a flourishing grace, unless all are watchful in this regard? If so, is not the first practical demonstration of the faithfulness enjoined just where the injured party goes kindly and privately to tell the delinquent of his fault? And does not reason itself teach that no course is so likely to result in preserving the church from sin and rupture as that laid down in the texts of Scripture which stand at the beginning of this chapter?

A few more thoughts may be suggested concerning the spirit which ought to pervade the church in respect to this subject. The feeling that prompts faithful admonition or rebuke should be that of kindness and forbearance. Delight in reminding a brother or sister of a fault, in order to send an arrow to the heart, is entirely wrong. The language of the great apostle to the Thessalonian Christians was, "We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. * * * And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, *but admonish him as a brother.*" And again: to the Galatians he said, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." On the other hand, the

counsel or reproof should be *received* with the same spirit in which it is given. The erring member should consider that the brethren have not only the covenanted *right*, but are impelled by imperative duty, to warn and rebuke. If he is at fault, reason teaches him the duty of being willing to be corrected. He should be in a spirit to appreciate the divine counsel, "Let the righteous smite thee ; it shall be a kindness : and let him reprove thee ; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break thy head." The duty to receive a merited reproof in love is just as plain as the duty to give it. Were this spirit universally and mutually cherished by the members of a church, every instance of delinquency could be corrected without resort to discipline. Every fault would be silently removed without attracting the attention of the world.

A faithful friend is a valued boon in all the walks of social life. He is a sort of "body guard" all along life's pathway. We readily concede to him the right to correct our faults. Indeed, we regard such faithfulness somewhat in the light of duty ; for "faithful are the wounds of a friend." He certainly is not my truest friend who suffers me to possess some marked defect of character without even suggesting that he perceives it. He is my best friend in the social relations of life who seeks my good in reminding me of my errors. These are sentiments which are neither new nor strange to persons united by the ties

of worldly friendship ; their hearts approve them. Surely, then, in the church of Christ all ought to be *Christian* friends as kind and true. Here it ought to be as rich a boon to have one faithful associate at least, who will not fail to remind us of stains seen upon our Christian characters. Influenced by such sentiments and united by such ties, we may truly sing, with a beautiful harmony of profession and practice, that familiar hymn, —

“How sweet, how heavenly, is the sight,
When those that love the Lord
In one another's peace delight,
And thus fulfil his word !

When each can feel a brother's sigh,
And with him bear a part ;
When sorrow flows from eye to eye,
And joy from heart to heart ;

When, free from envy, scorn, and pride,
Our wishes all above,
Each can his brother's failings hide,
And show a brother's love ;

When love, in one delightful stream,
Through every bosom flows,
And union sweet, and dear esteem,
In every action glows.

Love is the golden chain that binds
The happy souls above ;
And he's an heir of heaven that finds
His bosom glow with love.”

CHAPTER XI.

CHRISTIAN CONDUCT IN REGARD TO THE FORE- GOING TESTED BY PRAYER.

Prayer in the Ball Room. — Prayer for pernicious Fiction. — For Card Playing. — For Theatre-going. — Rumseller's Prayer. — May go boldly to Mercy Seat with innocent Things. — Herein Prayer is a marked Test of Christian Conduct. — The Christian should not persevere in a Course of Conduct upon which he cannot invoke the divine Blessing. — The Church Member neglecting Public Worship. — The Prayer-Meeting Absentee. — The Church-Meeting Absentee. — Absence from the Lord's Supper. — Delinquencies in refusing to pay proportional Part, to contribute generously for Missionary Purposes, and Want of Fidelity, all tested. — Contradiction between Prayer and Practice; why? — Prayer a Test of Conduct in regard to other Things. — Appeal to Christian Professors. — Conclusion.

A YOUNG man, son of one of the most respectable and wealthy inhabitants of Pennsylvania, was converted to Christ. His father was a violent opposer of religion, and endeavored, by various methods, to banish serious impressions from his mind, but in vain. The work of the Holy Ghost could not be undone. While the father was employing every means to dissuade his son from serving God, a ball was an-

nounced in the village. He *compelled* his son to attend. The merry party assembled in the lighted hall. Beauty, wealth, and fashion were there; all that was gay and alluring 'of the world was there. Joy beamed in every countenance, and gladness swelled in every heart. The young convert was urged to lead the dance. As the happy circle took their places upon the floor, and the cotillon was about to commence, the young man lifted his eyes heavenward, and said, "LET US PRAY!" The assembly were silent with astonishment; the hall became still as the grave. Prayer in the ball room was a strange incongruity to all. To supplicate the divine blessing upon the merry dance appeared to the most worldly a bold trifling with God himself. Although the young man did not intend to invoke the blessing of God upon the dance, but upon the souls of his gay companions, yet it doubtless seemed to them like opening the ball with a prayer. The fact shows that there are objects which we cannot guiltlessly commend to God in prayer, and places in which prayer seems a dreadful mockery. The truth may be variously illustrated.

A Christian trader is engaged in scattering abroad the light, pernicious literature of the age. Thousands of minds have been fatally poisoned by its contaminating influence; thousands more have been unfitted by it for serious thought. It has often nullified the pungent truths of the gospel; it has been

an imposing barrier to the progress of the church. Now, can he invoke the divine blessing to rest upon his pursuit? Can he carry contaminating novels in the arms of his prayer to the mercy seat? Can he ask God to smile upon the sale of books which multiply the enemies of religion? He dare not commend his business to the notice of God.

It is a winter's evening, and there is an innocent social gathering in the village. The church and the world are alike represented. None are there for the purpose of moral wrong; and the moments fly apace, while yet nothing occurs to alarm the Christian's conscience. At length the table is spread, and the worldly begin to shuffle the painted cards. Shall the disciple of Christ participate in the amusement? No gamblers are there; the game is all for pleasure; it seems innocent. But when the Christian regards the influence and tendency of such amusement, dare he invoke the divine blessing upon it? Let him propose to pray, and, quick as thought, the company lose their relish for the game.

Send the *theatre-going* disciple to his closet. The evening has arrived, and he has resolved to go. He has seen the flaming placard, and his interest is all aroused to witness the play. Can he cheerfully and conscientiously seek the favor of God as he goes to the amusement? Not he. The thought of bowing before the Most High, to seek his presence as he visits such a place, chills his very soul. He may go

with such worldliness as to have no thought of God or personal responsibility; but he dare not go thither from his closet. A gulf, as deep and wide as that which yawns between Lazarus and Dives, separates the closet from the theatre.

How is it with the vender of intoxicating drinks? Sometimes we find him in the church of Christ. Does he dream of commending his destructive pursuit to Almighty God? What horror would seize our souls to hear him supplicate Jehovah to give him success in his misery-making business—to increase his trade, and multiply customers, as the means of a livelihood! For such an object it is solemn mockery to pray.

The above examples manifestly involve such sinfulness that no one would dispute the gross impropriety of praying for their success. When we bring them to this simple but pungent test, their true moral character appears. The same is true in regard to lesser sins and improprieties, as we shall see in the progress of our remarks.

On the other hand, we can come boldly to the throne of grace with every pursuit and object which has the approval of God and the conscience. The husbandman, the mechanic, the toiler in any and every honorable vocation, may seek the divine blessing, confident that God will smile upon his faithful endeavors. Indeed, they are not only privileged to appear before God for guidance and grace, but it

becomes their bounden *duty* to seek his favor in these laudable callings. They are conscious of doing rightly, and know that God approves the act.

In the abandonment of every sinful course, also, men innocently supplicate for divine assistance. The Christian merchant may make his doings a subject of prayer when he commits pernicious books of fiction to the flames, but not when he offers them for sale. The Christian associate may pray over his deed when he refuses to shuffle the cards with worldly companions, but not when he joins with them in the amusement. The Christian professor may ask with boldness for the help of God when he turns his back upon the ball room and theatre, but not when he participates in their pleasures. The vender of strong drink need not hesitate to implore the benediction of Heaven upon his determination to abandon his calling, but not upon an intention to continue it. In one case they ask for what is agreeable to the divine will; in the other, for what is opposed to it. And the language of inspiration is, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing *according to his will*, he heareth us." Whatever is contrary to his will is *sinful*; and hence it is the soul of mockery to invoke the blessing of God upon it. Any thing which we clearly see to partake of *sin*, for that reason must be excluded from the subjects of prayer, except so far as we supplicate for its renovation or destruction.

Indeed, any thing of a *doubtful* character we cannot make a subject of prayer, only so far as relates to being guided aright concerning it.

In this light, PRAYER BECOMES A MARKED TEST OF CHRISTIAN CONDUCT. There are various principles and truths revealed in the Scriptures by which Christian conduct may be tested. There is also the example of Christ and of primitive saints; but no test is more simple and satisfactory than that of prayer. This applies to all places and circumstances, and to all people, old or young, rich or poor, bond or free. It can easily be applied; and its application requires no nice discrimination, but only an active conscience and a pious heart.

Do any doubt that whatever cannot be commended to God in prayer is sinful? Have we not seen above that we may pray for any thing which is "ACCORDING TO HIS WILL"? And what is agreeable to his will? Not any *sinful* thing, of course; only that which is pure, lovely, and of good report. Hence, when a professing Christian performs an act, or is engaged in a pursuit, or desires to secure an object, which he shrinks from commending to the notice of God in prayer, he may be quite assured that it is not according to the divine will, and is therefore sinful. It is enough for him to know that he is unwilling to spread it out before God in all its relations — that he fears to have it scrutinized by the omniscient eye. If it were pure, and he saw it to be such, he

would delight to bear it to the mercy seat, and subject it to the scrutiny of his sin-hating God.

The CONSCIENCE evidently condemns as sinful whatever the believer shrinks from laying before God in prayer. If the conscience approves a subject of prayer, there is no hesitation. The greater assurance the Christian has that God beholds it in all its relations, the more desirous is he to spread it before him. We are accustomed to think that this inward satisfaction we experience in performing an act is the approbation of conscience; and if this be true, must we not decide that when we experience the opposite, as we do in the thought of asking God to bless an unholy thing, it is the *condemning voice of conscience*?

It is, then, enough to know of a contemplated subject of prayer that God and the enlightened conscience disapprove of it; this is sufficient to brand it as wicked. Hence the principle which we advance as the test of Christian conduct; viz., THE CHRISTIAN OUGHT NOT TO PERSEVERE IN A COURSE OF CONDUCT UPON WHICH HE CANNOT INNOCENTLY SUPPLICATE THE DIVINE BLESSING.

To this test let us bring the principal delinquencies of church members as discussed in the foregoing. The Christian reader may not be fully satisfied that such delinquencies as have been exposed are particularly offensive to God. He may doubt whether they partake of a *sinful* character at all. The

truth may be easily ascertained by bringing them to the test of prayer. If a professing Christian can seek the blessing of God upon any one of the foregoing offences which may be laid to his charge, then, indeed, he may congratulate himself upon his freedom from sin in that particular; but if he shrinks from commending his course to God, and is rather disposed to continue his faults without seeking divine direction in relation to it, he may rest assured that it is not free from sin.

First, then, bring to the trial the church member who is a neglecter of public worship. He attends only a part of the day on each Sabbath, neglecting the other service without a reasonable excuse. He excuses himself from worship at all on stormy Sabbaths. Slight hinderances at any time prevent his attendance; or, if he constantly visits the place of public worship, perhaps he is listless and inattentive, and so demeans himself, that, if all the congregation should copy his example, the scene in the sanctuary would be intolerable. Now, tell me, erring professor, whoever you are, have you ever implored God to smile upon such a course? When you neglected the house of worship without a sufficient reason, did you spread your conduct before the Lord? Did you do this when you sat listless during the services of the Lord's house? No, no, I hear you say; and I am not surprised. You would not dare to do it; your conscience would pierce you

through with many arrows, and you would well nigh fear the descent of a bolt of divine wrath. You would not insult Jehovah by seeking his blessing upon one of the delinquencies named concerning public worship. What! ask God to bless you in the needless neglect of his worship—in undevout demeanor in his courts—in any act inconsistent with the spirit of true devotion! No, fellow-disciple; bring the matter to this decisive test, and duty becomes manifest.

The prayer-meeting absentee!—how stands the account with him? We mean the absentee whose habit is not to attend the social meeting, and that, too, for no good reason. Perhaps he is at the shops or stores, or on a friendly visit to a neighbor's family, or at some pleasure gathering, when the hour for the meeting arrives. Suppose he could be persuaded to seek the mind of God at the throne of grace concerning his conduct; in what language can he present his request? Can he find words suited to his case? Yes, he may; for even sin does not lack in phraseology. "Lord, my heart does not incline me to go to the place of prayer. I pray thee have me excused. Bless me in neglecting this means of grace. Go with me to the store and pleasure circle. There keep my heart from folly and my lips from speaking guile." Words are not wanting to express his real desires to God; but then, they falter on his tongue. His heart chills, and his soul shudders, and

his conscience upbraids as he thinks to utter them ; nay, for the world he would not lift his eyes heavenward with such a petition in his heart. His neglect, in the view of prayer, has not a redeeming quality. If his soul were ever goaded by remorse for his sins, such a prayer would increase it a thousand fold.

We have considered the importance of the church meeting as an agency of performing the necessary business of the church. We have seen what sad consequences may result from so great neglect of its claims as obtain at present, and how clearly it is the duty of professing Christians to give it their cordial support ; yet here is one who regards such meetings extremely dry and uninteresting — too much so to elicit his attendance. He, moreover, feels that no particular responsibility rests upon himself in regard to the transaction of church business ; or, if he acknowledges his responsibility, he is disposed to elude it, and leave the work to be done by others. Is his course just and Christian ? If so, he can pray that God may bless him in it. He can commend it to his notice in solemn supplication, morning and evening, and at all times in the day, sure that divine favor will be added. But if he be not acting the Christian part, it is presumption to seek God's blessing ; God will hold him in derision as he presents such a request. How, then, does he feel ? Has he ever been to the Hearer of prayer

with his conduct? *Dare* he go and tell his Master that he does not intend to share the responsibility of church action, and ask him to bless him in his resolve? If not, how can he continue in such neglect without experiencing pungent remorse? What opiate can he apply to his conscience to silence its upbraidings?

There is also the Lord's supper and its preparatory service. Important and solemn season! How many saints have renewed their strength at this feast of love, and gone forth to be better champions of truth in the conflicts of life! Instituted as a remembrancer of redeeming love, how sacred its observance is regarded by the divine Master! And yet this ordinance is not without its neglecters. Here and there is one who feels at liberty to neglect the communion season at his pleasure, in the face of the Savior's command, "This do in remembrance of me." Neither does he regard it important to "*examine himself*," and make preparation for the acceptable celebration of this ordinance. He comes to the table of the Lord with much the same want of spirituality that he attends upon any other service. How does God regard his course? The reply may be given in the fact that his soul would be seized with fearful apprehensions if he should invoke divine assistance in his delinquency. No argument or persuasion could induce him to spread out his conduct before God, unless it were to seek

forgiveness with tears of penitence and a broken heart. When he views his course in the light of prayer, its guilt flashes over his soul, and his cry becomes, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" No professed follower of Christ can ask God to bless him in unnecessary disregard of the Lord's supper and preparation for it.

Test the error of the Christian professor in respect to defraying the expense of supporting the gospel. The church member is not wanting, as we have seen, who refuses to pay his proportional part of parish expenses. The very consistent and righteous rule, that each one should pay according to his ability, is disregarded. A specific sum is pledged as the extent of his subscription, without regard to circumstances or the peculiar exigencies of the case. In every such instance, provided the subscription is less than the person's actual proportion, there is guilt when an examination is instituted with prayer. Every believer knows that it is unchristian in him to refuse to bear his part of the necessary burden, leaving it to be borne by others; at least, he learns it when he presents the matter before God. In his closet, upon his knees, there is but one voice sounding in his ears; and that is the voice of condemnation for his neglect, and urgent appeal to renounce his sin. Prayer stigmatizes the selfish policy which lessens one's just proportion, and arouses the suppliant's conscience to lash him

for his presumption in asking God to bless him in his niggardly practice.

In the ninth chapter we described the delinquencies of some professors in regard to the great missionary enterprise, the crowning glory of the present age. And now I ask the believer to bow with me at the throne of grace, and honestly test the controlling spirit of his life. Come, thou professed follower of Christ, to this solemn tribunal, and ask God to scrutinize your missionary spirit; for surely a Christian will not shun the light which may fall upon his conduct from the eternal throne. With the thought of six hundred millions of the human family perishing in their sins, and the Macedonian cry ringing in your ear from the four quarters of the globe, come, and before the heart-searching God let us test your self-denial and benevolence. Yea, with the solemn truth which you profess to believe and have vowed to live, that your influence, your property, and your all belong to God, — with this impressing your mind, come and decide upon the right or wrong of your course respecting a dying world. You complain that so many calls of charity make their demands upon you; dare you utter the complaint to God? Can you conscientiously commend any other spirit to his notice than that which rejoices to see the gates of benighted nations flung open to the heralds of the cross, and the opportunities of saving souls multiplied on every hand? Your

policy is not how much you can possibly give ; but *how little* you can give, and retain your reputation as a Christian. What terrors would seize upon your heart should you implore God to aid you in deciding *how little you can give !* You expend many dollars in journeying every year, in providing sumptuous entertainments for social parties, in rich and costly apparel, and then refuse the collector, or put him off with a pittance, because your expenses are so large. Dare you make such a practice the subject of prayer, and seek divine favor upon it ? In case your income is diminished, you curtail your contributions before you do your extravagant expenses. Can you pray God to succeed such a course ? You increase your family expenses as your wealth multiplies, while your contributions to the missionary cause remain the same. Would it not insult Jehovah to ask him to prosper you in this ? In short, you have little concern for a world lying in wickedness, never give unless appealed to, are satisfied if no collection is taken, and seldom think or pray for the heathen. Go to the mercy seat with such a spirit if you dare, to seek the blessing of God upon it ! The heavens would become as brass over your head, and the earth would seem vocal with the cry of accusers, and your solemn vows load you with reproaches. We have not suggested a single offence concerning the missionary enterprise which prayer does not condemn. No professed Christian, not even the

loosest hypocrite, dreams of imploring divine favor upon such acts.

We have seen that Christians often fail to discharge their duties in relation to offenders in the church — that personal offences are trumpeted abroad before they are carried to the guilty party, according to the direction in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew. What Christian would presume to seek the guidance of Heaven in thus proclaiming abroad a brother's fault before he has sought a settlement in private? It is only upon such a course as is specified in the above-named chapter that we should think to implore the divine blessing. Prayer condemns an alienation which is cherished without the effort to remove it. God must regard him who asks his favor in publishing abroad the faults of a brother before he is privately reproved and entreated as more sinful and presumptuous than the accused himself.

We have thus applied the test of prayer to the principal errors of professing Christians discussed in this volume. Those which we have passed over are less marked in respect to sinfulness, but are still of such a character that no person would think of praying for divine assistance in their practice. Believers who are chargeable with such delinquencies as have been exposed may be wont to pray for all the graces that constitute eminent spiritual mindedness ; but they never allude to such short-

comings unless it is to seek forgiveness. While living in the neglect of public worship, the prayer meeting, the Lord's supper, and other means of grace, they may still, in their morning and evening devotions, supplicate for more love, and faith, and zeal, but never allude to the above irregularities. Their prayers and their practice present a mournful contradiction, and show how hollow and heartless are their petitions ; all of which vindicates the views presented in regard to this pungent test of Christian conduct ; for, with all their insincerity and hollow heartedness, they dare not ask the blessing of God upon their course as they really design it to be, — a neglect of the important means of promoting spirituality, — but simply pray that the Lord would make them holy, without the most distant allusion to their actual inconsistencies. They may offer a thousand excuses for their neglect to their brethren, and even be ready to defend their course ; but at the throne of grace they dare not allude to such departures except in the language of the weeping penitent suing for mercy. To God they have no excuses to offer and no defence to institute.

A writer, already quoted,* says, in relation to the prayers of Christian disciples, "What solemn professions they make to God! what ardent desires they express! what numerous blessings they seek!

* Rev. J. A. James.

what strong resolutions they form ! Judging of ourselves by the prayers we pour forth in secret, or by each other by the utterances we hear when we meet with one accord to make our common supplication known, we may very properly say, 'What manner of persons ought we to be?' If we so pray, how ought we to live? What kind of people must we be to be up to the standard of our prayers? And ought we not, in some measure at least, to reach this standard? Should there not be a harmony, a consistency, a proportion, between our practice and our prayers?" And, I would add, there is only one way to secure that harmony; and that is, by forsaking these evil courses of conduct; for we can never bring the standard of our prayers down, down to such delinquencies. He who is chargeable with the offences exposed in this volume, one or all of them, might wish he could supplicate divine regard upon his irregular conduct, that hence no discrepancy between his prayers and practice might exist; but he dare not take such guilt upon his soul as to pervert his prayers to this end; he dare not ask God's blessing upon his life as it actually is. Therefore it is that his prayers are vastly in advance of his practice.

It is difficult to conceive how a professed follower of Christ, erring in the manner and to the extent described in this volume, can frame a prayer that will not reprove and scourge him far more than

the voice of the living rebuker. It seems as if every sentence, asking for guidance and a better heart, for grace and a holy life, must awaken a sense of guilt in his soul sufficient to silence his voice or make him a penitent. It seems as if he could not be blinded to the strange incongruity that exists between his devotions and his life, nor to the fact that to the Hearer of prayer his supplications are but unmeaning jargon. "To be insincere in our talk with our fellow-creatures—to ask for favors we do not wish to obtain—to solicit an interchange of offices we do not covet—to utter compliments we do not mean—to acknowledge obligations we do not feel—to lavish praises which we know are ill deserved—to appear anxious for friendship which we do not want—is a lamentable and criminal inconsistency which is but too common among professors; but how much more guilty is all this unmeaning prattle when addressed to the holy and heart-searching God!" * Strange, indeed, the delinquent professor does not behold it! Strange that he is not forced back into the path of a consistent and holy life!

We shall be justified in a slight departure from the main design of this chapter in speaking of the doubts which believers often entertain in regard to other points of Christian demeanor. There are moral questions of a more difficult nature to settle,

* Rev. J. A. James.

and concerning which there is much discussion and various sentiments among the people of God. They are such as relate to worldly connections, amusements, customs, expediency, and general conformity to social maxims. The Christian is often in doubt what path to pursue, what duty requires, how far to go. He desires to act rightly and for the honor of Christ. In relation to these and kindred points, how shall he decide? We know of no simpler or better test than prayer. Let him present the subject to God for wisdom and guidance; and if his supplication is dictated by a proper spirit, his doubts will generally be removed. At any rate, he will become well satisfied that he cannot safely perform a *doubtful* act, since he cannot conscientiously ask God to bless him in so doing. If such perplexing matters were more frequently settled in the closet, there would be far less conformity to the world.

Here let the Christian professor pause and commune a while with his own heart. Do one or more of the delinquencies discussed mar your religious character? As you have read these pages one by one, have you found nothing to rebuke any part of your walk and conversation? Has there been no place where your enlightened conscience has said, "That means me"? Can you bow before God, and, with no misgivings, pray for his blessing to rest upon your whole Christian walk? If not, if any of the foregoing irregularities have interrupted the consistency

of your conduct—if even one of the ordinances rises up to proclaim your neglect—if the Church hath aught against you because you come so seldom to her solemn feasts—I conjure you, by the tender love of Christ and his bleeding cause, to remember your covenant vows, and return to your first love with a penitent heart! Let not the sun go down upon a sin that drives you from the closet and seals your lips to prayer. Pursue not a course, with deliberate resolve, upon which you are afraid to ask the Most High to look with favor, lest you trifle with his goodness and provoke his wrath. Be an active, consistent, watchful, exemplary follower of the Lamb; and then lift up your head, for your redemption draweth nigh.

In allusion to the elevated aim and spotless purity of the patriarchs, prophets, and other illustrious saints, the apostle said, "GOD IS NOT ASHAMED TO BE CALLED THEIR God." They so conducted that he cheerfully owned and blessed them, and set them forth as ensamples to the world. We commend the truth to such churches as retain the foregoing SPOTS IN THEIR FEASTS OF CHARITY. IS NOT GOD ASHAMED TO BE CALLED YOUR GOD? In respect to an irregular life and multiplied neglects, does he delight to own and bless you? Take the consideration home to your hearts. Ponder it, pray over it; let it absorb your minds, until a just apprecia-

tion of its solemn import shall arouse you to be jealous of your Christian honor, and lead you to aim for that highest praise which can crown your exit from the world — “GOD IS NOT ASHAMED TO BE CALLED THEIR GOD !”

APPENDIX.

A.

DUTY TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH.

WHEN a church member is in such straitened circumstances that he must toil so as to unfit him for public worship on the Sabbath, he becomes an object of charity, and should be assisted by his brethren.

Christian duty towards the "poor of the church" is a subject deserving more attention than is generally bestowed upon it. Many churches make no provision for needy widows and others in poverty among their number. It is not unusual to find members of Christ's flock in the almshouse numbered with the "town's poor." Formerly, when it was the custom to decide the maintenance of paupers by a public auction, poor church members were often disposed of in the same way. The correct view of Christian obligation, in relation to needy brethren, does not appear to have been generally regarded. It is not ordinarily consistent with brotherly and sisterly devotion to allow a fel-

low-Christian to be supported at the public expense. A needy member of the church ought not to be sent to the almshouse unless it is in extreme circumstances ; such, for instance, as when a very feeble band has so many of their number to aid as absolutely to demand foreign assistance ; and even then I am not certain that the example of the primitive Christians does not make it the duty of wealthier sister churches to contribute to their relief, instead of leaving them to be supported by the town. Certainly there ought to be in every church such a bond of attachment and fellowship as will insure a prompt and cheerful contribution to the wants of the indigent members, if it be within the power of the more highly prospered brethren. This is honorable to religion ; this accords with the example of the primitive churches, which made provisions for their poor ; * and this alone commends itself to the conscience as the only Christian course to be pursued.

B.

UNCHRISTIAN WAY OF EXPRESSING OPPOSITION TO A PASTOR.

Nothing is more common than for church members at variance with their pastor to exhibit their hostility in the house of God by indifferent airs or other ways of expressing manifest dislike. It is the last place where such feelings ought to be indulged, yet in none is it more frequently witnessed.

In all that has been said concerning the delinquencies

* Rom. xv. 25, 26 ; 1 Cor. xvi. 1-3.

of Christians in relation to public worship, it has been supposed that the ministry is worthy of respect and confidence. This may not always be true; still, admitting that a Christian professor has a pastor who is uninstructional and uninteresting in the pulpit, and even morally delinquent out of it, the temple of God is not the place, nor the Sabbath the time, for him to express dislike. There is an ecclesiastical and Christian way of removing such a pastor; or, if this be impossible, the complainant can remove his relation to another church. So long as he continues where he is, he ought to conduct reverently in the house of worship, if not out of respect to his pastor, yet out of respect to his God.

C.

PASTORS' SALARIES COMPARED WITH THOSE OF PERSONS ENGAGED IN OTHER PURSUITS.

The subject of ministers' salaries is justly exciting some interest at the present time. Many churches realize that they have put their pastors upon too small allowance, and are now nobly coming to their aid by increasing their salaries. The Episcopal denomination report that the average salary of their pastors does not exceed four hundred dollars per annum. It is believed that the average salary of clergymen of other denominations does not exceed this amount. The laborers in many manual pursuits, as bonnet dressing and boot making, earn, in many instances, five hundred dollars annually, and even more; and that, too, without any further apprenticeship, by way of preparation, than the time of a few weeks or months. But clergymen, after a preparation of *ten years*, in which time

they might have accumulated, in almost any mechanical occupation, several hundred dollars, and after an expense of fifteen hundred dollars, as a direct outlay, in acquiring an education, even by the practice of economy, receive, upon an average, only the small salary of *four or five* hundred dollars. Then, how much greater are their necessary expenses at housekeeping than those of mechanics! In how many ways must they be *paying out*, while the common laborer is accumulating! Expenses incident to attending associational meetings, ecclesiastical councils, increase of library from year to year, subscriptions for many publications, without which he is not a pastor for the times, extensive correspondence, and many other items,—these present a view of the annual expenses of a minister beyond what is incidental to manual pursuits. Consider, too, that many ministers are receiving six hundred dollars salary when they might receive twice that amount in some other employment. We might name a minister who has had the opportunity, within a few weeks, of engaging in another pursuit with twice the salary he is now receiving. True, salaries are larger now than they were fifty years ago; but they have not increased in the same ratio with expense of living or the salaries of other men. Then the young man was fortunate to receive one hundred dollars annually; now, in various pursuits, he receives from three to five hundred. Then the accomplished clerk received but a few hundred dollars; now *fifteen hundred* and even *two and three* thousand dollars is frequently his compensation. The salaries of ministers have not increased in this proportion; hence it is proper that this subject should be agitated in our churches. Instead of paying the pastor as small a salary as can be done consistently, it should be so generous that he can add to his

library from year to year, "lay by something for a rainy day," and not be obliged to plan and be solicitous about "making his ends meet" from quarter to quarter. It is an encouraging sign of the times that this subject is receiving the attention of religious societies and that many are increasing the pastor's *wages*.

Reference is had above to the expenses incident to attendance upon ecclesiastical councils. A few churches have adopted the plan of defraying the expenses of the pastor and delegate on such occasions. All churches ought to imitate the good example. Perhaps, however, it would be more proper and just for the church calling the council to pay all its expenses. Sometimes pastors are invited to attend such bodies at a distance, and frequently they are obliged to decline because their limited salary will not admit of the expense. The cost of attending a single council is small; but the *aggregate* expense of attending the hundreds, which some pastors do in the course of their ministry, amounts to enough to purchase a valuable library or a comfortable homestead.

D.

THE CHURCH SHOULD LEAD, AND THE PARISH FOLLOW.

The parish ought to know its place and keep it. It is not its province to dictate in religious matters, but only in respect to temporalities. Yet there have been instances of such usurpation of religious rights on the part of the parish as to extend a "call" to a minister before any action of the church. This is usurpation outright. The Church is ar-

biter in all matters pertaining to her welfare. She never delegates this prerogative to the parish. She simply says, "I should be glad of your coöperation in supporting the means of grace, and will thank you for it. You may advise in matters of temporal concern, and in the settlement of a pastor I will gratefully receive your approval; but cannot transfer to you the responsibilities of my position as sole arbiter of the gospel's earthly interest." And every reasonable person will concede that the ground of this authority is just; viz., Christians only are qualified to judge of the theology and piety of the candidate. True, a wise church will not settle a pastor in opposition to the wishes of a majority of the parish; and often many Christians set aside their own feelings about the fitness or unfitness of the candidate, and consent to his settlement or rejection because of the unanimous decision of the parish. But the truth should never be concealed, that the church is *prior* in respect to claim, and *superior* in respect to authority. She should always act *first*, impressed with her solemn obligations, and then invite the parish to coöperate. She should *lead*, and the parish *follow*.

E.

SYSTEM OF TAXATION TO SUPPORT THE GOSPEL.

We would not be understood to mean that the system of taxation is wrong. Indeed, a tax may be *voluntary* as the unanimous decision of the parish makes it so; still we employ the phrase, "voluntary system," in the popular sense, the opposite of taxation. We mean to say that the primitive churches supported the means of grace by voluntary contributions instead of assessments. It is

not asserted or denied that the change wrought in the circumstances of the church, from that day to this, may now render the taxing system best for the cause of Christ. It is plain that, without it, there are some in almost every church who would not pay their proportional part. Reasons may be urged in favor both of the *voluntary* and taxing methods; but it is not the design of this volume to discuss them.

The attention of some churches has recently been directed to the following important considerations. Among their number are widows possessing more or less property, and maidens accumulating money faster than many a poor Christian father can, with his numerous family to support; yet it has not been the custom to ask them to contribute for the support of the gospel. The indigent father, with a half dozen children to feed and clothe, is expected to do his part; while such females, abundantly more able to assist, are not held responsible. Here is evidently a subject demanding attention. If there is property in the hands of the female members of the church, there is no reason, ordinarily, why it should not be accounted as the property of males in regard to supporting the means of grace.

Since writing the above, our attention has been called to the following fact. Two young men, about the same age, and engaged in the same pursuit, and receiving the same wages daily, are members of the same church. One of them is married, and has children to support; yet his subscription for the support of the gospel is *four times* as large as that of the unmarried young man. Now, it is evident that a young man without a family can accumulate money faster than he who is a husband and father; and, if so, his contributions — other things being equal — ought to be larger; but this is not generally the case; and Christian

young men, unmarried, and receiving as large wages as others, give far less than those who are the heads of families. Indeed, they are not expected to contribute as liberally. The above incident is a fair illustration of a general fact. It is a matter deserving attention, and, if possible, correction.

F.

IS THE REFUSAL OF A CHURCH MEMBER TO PAY HIS PROPORTIONAL PART A DISCIPLINABLE OFFENCE ?

In this connection, the question may arise, Is the refusal of a church member to pay his "proportional part" a *disciplinable* offence? In many churches it has been treated as such, while in others it has been adjudged *censurable* only. The reply lies in a nutshell. No act is disciplinable unless it violates the COVENANT. Is, then, the refusal of a professed Christian to pay his "proportional part" of the expenses a breach of his *covenant* obligations? It surely is; for, if a person covenants to do any thing when he enters the church, *does he not covenant to support the gospel according to his ability?* And more; does he not covenant to support the gospel *in the way adopted by the church at the time of his admission?* Then his refusal violates his *covenant*, and he is a proper subject of discipline.

G.

PLEA THAT SABBATH SCHOOLS WERE ORIGINALLY DESIGNED FOR THE POOR CONSIDERED.

Since the original design of the Sabbath school was to furnish religious instruction solely to *neglected* children,

it may be urged that the members of the church, with their households enjoying religious instruction at the fireside cannot be expected to sustain this institution by their presence and efforts ; but this plea cannot stand at the present day. Although the enterprise was commenced with reference to the instruction of the destitute, yet experience has proved it to be indispensable to all the children, and, indeed, to all the members of society. The time has come when the withdrawal of intelligent religious families from the Sabbath school would utterly destroy it. Only let it be known and seen, at the present day, that the poor and morally neglected alone are expected to be members, and it would repel a large part of the class it is designed to benefit. To make the institution popular and flourishing, all classes and conditions of men must coöperate in sustaining it. The idea of social and moral distinctions must be discarded as much as possible.

H.

EXAMPLES OF MATERNAL INFLUENCES AMONG THE LEARNED.

Lord Bacon was wont to speak of the intellectual and moral education of his childhood, by his excellent mother, in terms of profound gratitude ; and, to testify his appreciation of her moulding influence in the formation of his character, he requested that he might be buried with her at St. Michael's.

The distinguished German philosopher, Kant, says, " I shall never forget that it was my mother who caused the good which is in my soul to fructify."

Dr. Samuel Johnson was no less sensible of his obligations to maternal fidelity, and found great delight in supporting his mother, although he was extremely poor himself. He sold his *Rasselas* for the paltry sum of fifteen pounds to defray the expense of her last sickness and funeral.

I.

MARKED EXAMPLE OF MATERNAL INFLUENCE IN HUMBLE LIFE.

Arvine relates that, in the vicinity of Philadelphia, there resided a mother distinguished for her success in the religious education of her children. Early in life they all became hopefully pious. A clergyman visited her in order to learn the secret of her success. To his interrogations the woman replied, "While my children were infants on my lap, as I washed them, I raised my heart to God, that he would wash them in that blood which cleanseth from all sin. As I clothed them in the morning, I asked my heavenly Father to clothe them with the robe of Christ's righteousness. As I provided them food, I prayed that God would feed their souls with the bread of heaven and give them to drink of the water of life. When I have prepared them for the house of God, I have pleaded that their bodies might be fit temples for the Holy Ghost to dwell in. When they left me for the weekday school, I followed their infant footsteps with a prayer that their path through life might be like that of the just, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. And as I committed them to the rest of night, the silent breathing of my soul has been, that their heavenly Father would

take them to his embrace and fold them in his paternal arms."

L.

EXAMPLES OF SYSTEMATIC BENEVOLENCE.

A wealthy manufacturer, belonging to the Methodist denomination, was recently called upon by an agent, who remarked, "Mr. —, are you not wearied by the repeated calls of agents?" The benevolent man looked up with some surprise, and replied, in substance, "By no means. It is a great convenience to me; it saves me time and expense; for, if they did not call, I should be obliged to go, or send, to the offices of the various benevolent societies." He was a *systematic* giver, and consequently did not "wait" to give, and would *carry* his contributions if agents did not call for them.

The following, from the American Messenger, is a striking illustration of the same truth:—

"A short time since, the Rev. Mr. A—— presented to my people the claims of one of our great benevolent societies, and on Monday I called with him on several members of the congregation. Entering the counting room of a merchant, the following interview, in substance, occurred:—

Mr. A.— Good morning, Mr. B——. Our openings for usefulness are multiplying, and all that the churches will intrust to us we can most profitably employ on the field of our labors.

Mr. B.— I am always glad to see you, Mr. A——, and to do what I can for your noble society, (handing him a liberal donation.) We all ought to feel that *we are but stewards*, and be diligent in doing good while we may.

Mr. A. — Thank you, thank you, *Mr. B.* — We know you are a steadfast friend, and so is your partner, *Mr. C.* — Is he in, this morning?

Mr. B. — No, sir; he is in Europe. He was unexpectedly called to France on business, and sailed in the steamer some weeks since, to be absent about six months.

Mr. A. — Then I suppose we shall lose his subscription this year.

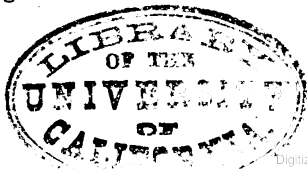
Mr. B. — No, sir. One of the last things he did before sailing was, to request me "*to attend to his charities with the same care as to his other business*, and to give, for him, to the various objects of benevolence, as they might come before our church, about the same that he gave last year, or, if any thing, rather more, as this year we have been prospered." Do you remember what was the amount of his subscription last year?

Mr. A. — One hundred dollars.

Mr. B. — Well, here is a check for one hundred and fifty dollars, which is about what I think he would give if he were at home.

With thanks to the giver, and especially to Him who had prompted to the gift, the agent went on his way, wishing, 1. That all would feel that they are but *stewards*. 2. That all would consider their *charities* a part of their *business*; and 3. That all would give to the great objects of benevolence *systematically* and *on principle*, whether at home or abroad.

The late Hon. Amos Lawrence is said to have given away more than *half a million of dollars* during his life. On his pocket book was written, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"



25

TA 0380

3 14 4.2 17 14

DARROW'S

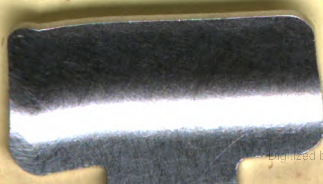
T

57776

BV4525

T5

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY



25